

Spring 2007

Sacrament of Deification: The Eucharistic Vision of Alexander Schmemmann in Light of the Doctrine of Theosis

Janet Puppo

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SACRAMENT OF DEIFICATION: THE EUCHARISTIC VISION OF
ALEXANDER SCHMEMMANN IN LIGHT OF THE DOCTRINE OF *THEOSIS*

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty

of the Department of Theology

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

Janet M. Bellotti Puppo

April 10, 2007

To my parents, Dominic and Mary Bellotti,
who taught me to believe, to hope, and to love
above all things

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge with gratitude those who have accompanied me on my wonderful journey into the world of Eastern Orthodoxy. First of all, I am very grateful to Rev. Dr. Michael Slusser for his confidence in the viability of this study, and for his assistance in preparing the proposal. I am deeply grateful to Dr. Jean Donovan, whose direction kept me focused on the wisdom of *Hansel and Gretel*, and the importance of the narrative. I am also indebted to Orthodox priest and theologian, Rev. Dr. Radu Bordeianu. My work, as well as the Duquesne University community, has been especially blessed by his timely presence. In addition, I extend my gratitude to my first professor at Duquesne, Dr. George Worgul, whose wisdom and sacramental insights encouraged my interest in sacramental theology. A special note of thanks is due to scholar and friend, Dr. Marie Baird, for her support and encouragement of this study.

I would also like to acknowledge the Rev. Dr. John Erikson and Dr. Paul Meyendorff, for their gracious hospitality during my visit to St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary. I am especially grateful for their permission to reproduce my interviews with them in this investigation. I would like to thank Karen Jermyn, the Assistant Librarian at St. Vladimir's Seminary library, for her assistance in my research. In addition, I would like to extend my appreciation to Fr. Thomas Hopko for his response to my inquiries about his father-in-law, Fr. Schmemmann. A thank you is in order to Dr. Donald Fairbairn for his permission to elaborate on the theme of his text, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*. Lastly, a special thank you to the staff of Barbour Library and the Pittsburgh Theological Seminary for the use of their resources over the years.

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SACRAMENT OF DEIFICATION: THE EUCHARISTIC VISION OF ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN IN LIGHT OF THE DOCTRINE OF *THEOSIS*

Introduction

“...It is time for Catholics and Orthodox to make an extra effort to understand each other better and to recognize with the renewed wonder of brotherhood what the Spirit is accomplishing in their respective traditions toward a new Christian springtime.”¹ At the dawn of the third millennium, like no other time in history, divided Christendom must reclaim its sacramental and eschatological vocation as the presence and experience of the Kingdom of God in this world, and its anticipation in the world to come. The new age of the Holy Spirit, ushered in by the Church of Christ, began as a time of Christian self-identity and self-fulfillment. It was a time when believers who gathered on the eighth day “to eat and drink at Christ’s table in his Kingdom” (Lk 22:29-30) shared in the peace and joy of the Holy Spirit who empowered them to be witnesses of evangelization in and to the world.² It was a time when the Church was one in mind and heart seeking communion with God. It was a time when She extended her arms in a universal embrace and desired nothing more than to share her Truth to the ends of the earth. Today’s world is in dire need of the ecclesial vision and apostolic spirit of the first Pentecost.

The Church of the first Christians has weathered many storms on her journey throughout history. Political, cultural, social, ideological and religious setbacks have

¹ John Paul II, “*Eastern Theology Has Enriched the Whole Church*” (Vatican City: Church Documents, 1996) [database on-line]; available from Catholic Information Network.

² Alexander Schmemmann, “Prayer, Liturgy, and Renewal,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XIV (Spring, 1969): 7-16.

contributed to a shift in ecclesial understanding and structure. As a result, the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Church faces divisions, fallen human nature, prejudice and exclusivity in her mission to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Risen and Glorified, to this world. Having endured the hardships of a long and often bitterly cold winter of division, it is time for the Church to move forward into a season of rebirth. It must attend to the sounds of a theological springtime and the voices of holy men and women announcing a season of hope and promise to a generation who longs to blend their voices in harmony with those of their separated brothers and sisters. These are the Christians who have inscribed the melodies of the Fathers and Mothers of the early Church in their hearts, in hope of composing a new hymn of praise worthy of Christ's prayer "...that they may all be one, as you, Father, are in me and I in you, that they also may be in us..." (Jn 17:21)

In concert with the theological voices from the Christian East in particular (e.g. Alexander Schmemmann, Dumitru Staniloae, Vladimir Lossky, Panayiotis Nellas, Georgios Mantzaridis, Christoforo Stavropoulos, Kallistos Ware, John Meyendorff, Paul Meyendorff, John Erickson), as well as representative voices from the Christian West (e.g. Romano Guardini, Marie-Vincent Bernardot, Jean-Marie Tillard, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, Louis Bouyer), this study proposes that the seeds for a new Christian springtime were planted in the Church of the first Christian communities. Rooted in the writings and praxis of the Eastern Fathers, the fundamental teaching "that humankind is made in the image of God and called to his likeness; that the *Logos* of God took on human flesh; and that humanity is brought into communion with God in the Holy

Spirit,”³ constitutes what the Christian Church of the East refers to as the doctrine of *theosis* (deification or divinization). It is regarded as “God’s greatest gift to humanity, the ultimate goal of human existence⁴ and the intimate union of the human person with the Triune God.”⁵ At the forefront of the theological vision of the Church of the Christian East, it provides the answer to the vital questions confronting the human person, “Who am I?” and “What is my destiny?” Inherent in this Patristic orientation is the belief that the Church is the *locus* wherein humanity’s nature as “inclined towards God,”⁶ and its destiny as “called to be a god,”⁷ are capable of being realized. Precisely in the sacrament of the Eucharist, the believer becomes a sharer in the divine life of the Triune God, effecting a union which, for the Fathers, establishes the content and means of *theosis* and “constitutes the highest form of expression of God’s love towards humanity.”⁸

This study will seek to retrieve the eastern Patristic doctrine of *theosis* to determine how the Eucharist can be understood in its light in order to posit that the deifying nature of the Eucharist is the concrete means by which the Christian faithful already begin to realize their participation in the divine life of the Triune God, the real act of *theosis*. United to the Eucharistic Body and Blood of Christ, they are endowed with

³ Georgios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition* (New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1984), 12.

⁴ Jules Gross, *La Divinisation du Chrétien d’après les Pères Grecs* (Paris, 1938), 344; quoted in Mantzaridis, 12.

⁵ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1983), 3,139; quoted in Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Cumbria: Paternoster Press, 1999), 7.

⁶ Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspectives on the Nature of the Human Person* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1987), 9.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁸ Gregory of Palamas, *Homily 56,6, Oikonomos 207*; quoted in Mantzaridis, 51.

the promise and hope of their divine inheritance as adopted sons and daughters of God destined to share in divine plenitude. It will argue that the Eucharistic vision of Orthodox theologian and priest, Alexander Schmemmann, offers the most cogent evidence in support of this intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the doctrine of *theosis*.

At the outset, this writer takes into account that both the Eastern and Western Christian Church claim union with God to be the ultimate goal of humanity. This investigation will be limited to the Eastern Christian theological perspective of *theosis* as a viable, dynamic and promising orientation from which to render a Eucharistic vision for the Church of the third millennium. The intention of this writer is not to postulate such an orientation as an absolute, nor to set it over and above other theological perspectives. It is, however, offered as a challenge to both the Eastern and Western Church to engage one another's theological vision for the sake of overcoming the great divide that robs the universal Christian Church and the world of the beauty and the richness inherent in both traditions.

Method and Procedure to be Used in the Investigation

Chapter One, entitled, "Called Into Being," begins with the premise that a Eucharistic crisis exists in the Christian Church. Based on the observations of Alexander Schmemmann, this introductory section of Chapter One will explore the effects of 'secularism' and 'liturgical unconsciousness' on the Church and how these current trends extend beyond ecclesial boundaries into the world. It will propose that a Eucharistic vision based on the doctrine of *theosis* offers a means to overcome the current crisis in the Christian Church and in the world.

The remaining sections in Chapter One serve to situate the source of *theosis* within trinitarian *perichoresis*. Borrowing heavily upon the major works of Eastern theologians Dumitru Staniloae and Vladimir Lossky, Chapter One traces the doctrine of *theosis* from its roots in trinitarian *perichoresis* through creation and the teaching of the Eastern Fathers of the Church. This chapter concludes with the argument that *theosis* is begun within the life of the Church and is already realized within the sacraments of the Church, especially through Baptism and Eucharist.

Inspired by Donald Fairbairn's text, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes*, Chapter Two challenges the reader of this investigation to a theological stance that is open to the particular and sometimes differing, though not necessarily contradictory, views of Eastern Christians. Its title, "Engaging Eastern Christianity On Its Own Terms,"⁹ demonstrates the writer's intention to treat the salient issues of the Eastern Christian theological perspective in a manner that is faithful to its tradition. Aided by Fairbairn's thematic models, this chapter looks at how the Eastern tradition regards Creation, the Fall, Redemption, Salvation and Elevation, and notes how the Church interprets them in light of *theosis*. Like Chapter One, this chapter will be based on the writings of a "renaissance strand of Eastern Orthodox"¹⁰ theologians whose writing has brought "a vitality and vibrancy seldom before experienced."¹¹ Key figures among these twentieth century writers include Lossky, Mantzaridis, Nellas, Staniloae and Stavropoulos. Their works will provide the lens through which the spirit and the vision of the Eastern Fathers will be focused.

⁹ Donald Fairbairn, *Eastern Orthodoxy Through Western Eyes* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

The purpose of Chapter Three, “*Theosis*, the Blessed *Telos* for Which All Things Were Made,”¹² is to provide the theological foundation for the doctrine of *theosis* as articulated by the Eastern Fathers and repeated over the centuries by Eastern Christian theologians. Particular attention will be given to the significance of the Incarnation in the deification of humanity. Two key biblical passages, the revelation of God to Moses on Mt. Sinai and the transfiguration of Jesus, will serve as the framework to explore the themes of divine darkness, divine light and the divine energies. Seminal works of St. Gregory of Nyssa and St. Gregory of Palamas will provide the core content for this discussion.

The kernel of this investigation is found in Chapter Four, “Sacrament of Deification.”¹³ Through the works of Alexander Schmemmann, this chapter will argue that the doctrine of *theosis* informs, enhances and illuminates Eucharistic understanding. His vision will be posited as embracing the most far-reaching and coherent aspects of the doctrine as has been treated thus far. Forming the foundation to Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision is a sacramental understanding of the world. Schmemmann believes that the world is given as gift to humanity as the means of communion with God.¹⁴ He argues the need to recover the fullness of the ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist that will foster a living connection between the liturgical experience and life. He posits that the Eucharistic liturgy is the event that actualizes God’s economy and

¹² Gregory Nazianzus, *To Thallasios*, 60; quoted in Daniel Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Michigan, 1994), 120.

¹³ Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Lectures and Essays on Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience* (New York, 1974), 21.

¹⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, 2000), 34.

sets in motion the ultimate destiny of creation, “that Christ might fill all things with himself.”¹⁵

In Chapter Five, “Hints of *Theosis* in Western Eucharistic Theologies of the Twentieth Century,” the attention shifts to the Western Christian Church in search of Latins of the twentieth century whose work intimates a correlation between *theosis* and the Eucharist. The chapter begins with an overview of the theological contributions of Romani Guardini, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou and Louis Bouyer. As major players in the ecclesial and liturgical renewal of the Church of the twentieth century, their theological insights and contributions made a dramatic impact on the theological worldview of Alexander Schmemmann. This section serves to situate Schmemmann within the theological climate of the century as well as to draw parallels to his own work. The examination will then target the work of two French Dominicans, Marie-Vincent Bernadot and Jean-Marie Tillard, whose eucharistic visions represent the mid and latter part of the twentieth century, respectively. *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, (Bernadot) and *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église* (Tillard) will be analyzed and offered as evidence in support of the writer’s contention that hints of the doctrine of *theosis* are imbedded within the eucharistic theologies of these scholars.

The sixth and final chapter of the investigation, “Toward a Renewed Theological Vision,” will examine the implications that a Eucharistic vision, rooted in the doctrine of *theosis*, promises for Eucharistic theology. It will begin with a description of the observed intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the doctrine of *theosis* as substantiated by Schmemmann’s Eucharistic theology and supported by the select treatises of Bernadot

¹⁵ Liturgy of St. Basil; quoted in Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, 90.

and Tillard. Chapter Six will also posit the inferential arguments proposed by the study to determine the evidence in support of the thesis, as well as to examine the contributions that the investigation offers to the theological community.

At the conclusion of this chapter, the writer will explore the need for further research to be done in the areas of Mariology, liturgy and Christian ecumenism. A proposed study of Mary as the model of *theosis* would enrich Orthodox theology and engage Western Christian Mariological doctrines. Schmemmann's text, *The Virgin Mary*, is rich in deification themes around which to build such an investigation. A proposed study in the area of liturgy would offer an investigation into the biblical images and symbolism imbedded in the Divine Liturgies of Saint Basil and St. John Chrysostom so as to illuminate sacramental understanding. Jean Daniélou's text, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, offers sound mystagogical and patristic references to aid in this task. Additional research on the eighth century document of St. Germanus of Constantinople, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, would aid in the research. The third and final proposed study addresses Christian ecumenism. Based on the Parisian theological community of the twentieth century, this research proposes a model of seminary formation that seeks to bridge the distance between the Eastern and Western Christian Church by offering a formative, theological climate geared toward understanding, forgiveness, reconciliation and global theology. This model would foster a spirit of worship and theological dialogue that eradicates the mistrust and resentments of the past and builds a theology of hope for the future of the Church and the world. The theological basis for this model will be constructed with the ecumenical contributions of Yves Congar, assisted by the Eucharistic and ecclesial theologies of Louis Bouyer and Alexander Schmemmann, and

enriched by Jean Daniélou's theory of the significance of biblical theology appropriated in the liturgy. This model seeks to uncover the transforming and unifying effects of the Eucharist on Christian unity.

CHAPTER ONE

CALLED INTO BEING

Introduction

The Eucharist constituted the identity of the early Church. In her assembly, She was the manifestation of the presence of the Kingdom of God already in this world and the promise of the future in the new age to come. The baptized, who professed faith in Jesus Christ as the Risen and Glorified Lord, ate and drank the Lord's supper in remembrance, in thanksgiving and in unity. These gatherings on the eighth day of the week, the Lord's Day, revealed the centrality of the Eucharist in the life of the early Christians. What was accomplished in the Eucharistic *ecclesia* revealed the true nature and destiny of humanity: the vocation to *theosis*, the participation in the life of the Triune God and eternal union with Him. Furthermore, the perfecting and deifying character of the Eucharist identified the inseparable nature of the relationship of the Church, the world and the Kingdom. This was the experience of the Church of the early Fathers.

Over two millennia later, however, Christian theologians and liturgists raised their voices in a clamor that was heard in both Eastern and Western Christianity, demanding a renewal and revival in ecclesiological understanding. It was a call that sparked a liturgical movement of reform that would serve to rediscover the connection between what is accomplished in the Church's Eucharistic *leitourgia* and how it is understood and lived by its members. Absence of a vibrant Catholicism, the influence of secularistic worldviews and a lack of liturgical consciousness posed grave ontological challenges for the Church and the world. Orthodox priest, pastor and theologian, Father Alexander Schmemmann identifies this situation as a Eucharistic crisis.

To this end, Schmemmann posits that a rediscovery of the Eucharist as it was experienced in the age of the early Fathers of the Church, is the only solution to the current crisis in the Church and in the world. This writer argues that rediscovering the Eucharist in the patristic spirit mandates a return to the theological vision that has formed the basis of all Eastern Christian theological vision: the doctrine of *theosis* and its intrinsic link to Eucharistic understanding.

The contents of Chapter One serve to frame the entire investigation by tracing the origin of the doctrine of *theosis* to its roots in *perichoresis*. One discovers that it is within the mystery of Trinitarian *perichoresis* that creation originates. With Dumitru Staniloae as a guide, the reader will be introduced to the Orthodox theologian's theology of cosmic transfiguration. This theory serves as the evidence that creation, as the manifestation of divine goodness, implies God's intent that all of His creation participate in His divine, trinitarian life in eternal union. As the theological vision *par excellence* of Eastern Christianity, *theosis* constitutes the vocation and the ultimate destiny of humanity.

In addition, an introduction to *theosis* as the theological vision of Eastern Christianity will situate the Church as the *locus*, and the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist in particular, as the means of *theosis*. Through the lens of Staniloae, the deifying role of the Holy Spirit within the ecclesial community will be examined in light of the Eastern Christian understanding of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit. Staniloae explores the unifying role of the Holy Spirit in effecting the sobornicity of the Church, and argues that the true model of ecclesial community rests within the divine trinitarian relationships. The chapter concludes with Staniloae's insights into the deifying dimension of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. He submits that union with God occurs in

the sacramental life of the Church initiated in Baptism and perfected by the transforming, divinizing energy of the Holy Spirit in the Eucharist. Patristic, scriptural and liturgical voices will serve as Staniloae's dialogue partners to provide the content with which to develop the argument of the investigation: *theosis* occurs within the Church through Baptism and Eucharist.

Chapter One opens by exposing two problems which Schmemmann argues have disrupted ecclesial, Eucharistic, liturgical, and indeed, entire theological understanding since the post-patristic era. Schmemmann identifies these issues as a Eucharistic crisis and a lack of liturgical consciousness. Writing in the late twentieth century and in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, his thinking would join ranks of prominent western theologians like Guardini, Daniélou, Bouyer and Congar, whose theology contributed to the liturgical movement, ecclesial reform, and patristic revival of the time. Their theological contributions will be further examined in Chapter Five. At the same time, however, there is an underlying caustic tone apparent in Schmemmann's work with regards to the negative impact of western scholasticism on these issues. The breadth of Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision begins with an understanding of his insights into the crisis which he believes has begun to erode the Eucharistic and, indeed, liturgical experience of the Church.

A Eucharistic Crisis

How did the Fathers of the early Church balance in "a living and truly 'existential' synthesis...the 'otherness' of God, the impossibility for creatures to know Him in his essence...and the reality of [humanity's] communion with God, knowledge of

God and ‘*theosis*?’”¹ For Alexander Schmemmann, the answer lies in how the Fathers regarded the “*mysterion*” and “its mode of presence and operation—the symbol.”²

Schmemmann observes:

For it is the very nature of symbol that it reveals and communicates the ‘other’ *as* precisely the ‘other,’ the visibility of the invisible *as* invisible, the knowledge of the unknowable *as* unknowable, the presence of the future *as* future. The symbol is means of knowledge of that which cannot be known otherwise, for knowledge here depends on participation—the living encounter with and entrance into that ‘epiphany’ of reality which the symbol is. But then theology is not only related to the ‘mysterion’ but has in it its source the condition of its very possibility...The ‘original sin’ of post-patristic theology consists...in the reduction of the concept of knowledge to rational or discursive knowledge or, in other terms, in the separation of knowledge from ‘mysterion.’³

The intrinsic link between the Eucharist and humanity’s vocation to *theosis*, so naturally imbedded in the vision of the Fathers, is identified by Schmemmann as knowledge of God obtained by participation in the sacraments.

Schmemmann’s theology is impassioned by his certitude that the quintessential act that determines the Christian approach to life, to the world and to God, is the experience of the Church in her *leitourgia* where She communicates her true identity.⁴ He argues that the only way that Christianity can remain alive in the world today is through a vision of life that is convinced of the eschatological character of all things; a vision of life so illumined that it is able to refer and to lift up everything to God. Schmemmann believes that the source of this light is the Eucharist. “In everything that I preach, or teach, or

¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 140-141.

² *Ibid.*, 141.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

write, I want this answer to appear, hopefully to shine through.”⁵ The Church is her most true self in the celebration of the Eucharist.

In November of 1983, shortly before his death, Schmemmann made the chilling accusation that a Eucharistic crisis existed in the Church that was attacking its very foundations.⁶ At the root of this crisis was a growing climate of “secularism”⁷ and a disposition of indifference toward the significance of liturgical worship. Both of these observations are strikingly connected and have influenced much of Schmemmann’s work. Schmemmann argues that the loss of the cosmic, ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist, so inherent in patristic understanding, has contributed to the problems that undermined ecclesial and sacramental understanding in the late twentieth century.

Schmemmann attributes the root cause of the Eucharistic crisis to the worldview of secularism. According to Schmemmann, secularism is “the progressive and rapid alienation of...culture”⁸ which has enveloped humanity. It is an “attempt to steal the world away from God”⁹ and its purpose as the means of communion with Him. Consequently, humanity, and not God, has become the measure of all things.¹⁰ Such thinking, he contends, has eroded the foundations of Christian identity.

Directly related to secularism is a prevailing attitude of liturgical indifference which is apparent in both Eastern and Western Christian traditions. Schmemmann calls it

⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973 – 1983*, trans. Julianna Schmemmann (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 24.

⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 9.

⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 7.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 10.

“a real disintegration of the liturgical life of the Church.”¹¹ It is an attempt to ambush the liturgy of its soul and to thwart its mission to constitute the Church as the Sacrament of the Kingdom of God on earth. Consequently, what prevails is a “lack of connection and cohesion between what is accomplished in the Eucharist and how it is perceived, understood and lived.”¹² Benedictine liturgist, Lambert Beauduin anticipated this dilemma at the dawn of the twentieth century. He writes:

The piety of the Christian people, and hence their actions and life, are not grounded sufficiently in the fundamental truths that constitute the soul of the liturgy: that is, the destiny of all things unto the glory of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost: the necessary and universal contemplation of Jesus Christ: the central place of the Eucharistic sacrifice in the Christian life: the mission of the hierarchy in regard to our union with God: the visible realization of the communion of saints. All these truths, which find expression in every liturgical act, are asleep in [human’s] souls; the faithful have lost consciousness of them. Let us change the routine and monotonous assistance at acts of worship into an active and intelligent participation; let us teach the faithful to pray and confess these truths in a body: and the liturgy thus practiced will insensibly arouse a slumbering faith and give a new efficacy, both in prayer and action, to the latent energies of the baptized souls: the true Christian spirit will flourish again and maintain itself among the faithful.¹³

Beauduin’s observations would prove to be influential in Schmemmann’s thinking and later find their place in some of his writings. The liturgical movement of the twentieth century owes much to the Benedictine communities.

The grave ontological challenges that result from secularist worldviews and from a “liturgical unconsciousness”¹⁴ give rise to skewed meanings of existence. Humanity suffers from restlessness, dissatisfaction, greed, oppression, violence, depression and

¹¹ Alexander Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 9, no.4 (1965): 171.

¹² Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 9.

¹³ Lambert Beauduin, O.S.B., *La Piété de l’Église* (Louvain, 1914); quoted in Thomas Fisch, ed., *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann* (New York, 1991), 2.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

other manifestations of emptiness. The ramifications of this ontological confusion have rippled throughout the entire world, affecting believers and non-believers alike. They give rise to ecclesial, social and cultural situations which compromise the true nature of the dignity of the human person created in God's image. They also manifest a loss of awareness of the nature of the Church as a corporate community called to the mission of the salvation of the world.

Like Schmemmann, this writer contends that there is a dire need for a Eucharistic renewal in the Church that mandates a return to the spirit and the vision of the Eastern Fathers; a spirit deeply immersed in the doctrine of *theosis*. "I *do* believe that precisely here, in this holy of holies of the Church, in this ascent to the table of the Lord in his Kingdom, is the source of that renewal for which we hope," remarks Schmemmann.¹⁵ At the dawn of the twenty-first century, the Church is faced with issues that strike at the core of her identity as the Presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. Rediscovery of the Eucharist in its cosmic, ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions will empower Christians with a vision of life and the world that is imbued with meaning and purpose. The Church will realize her true identity and mission to manifest the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. Believing Christians will discover their true identity as *homo adorans* and reclaim their apostolic mission to evangelize and transform the world. The liturgy will be the true service of the people and God will once again become the reference point and meaning of all things.

¹⁵ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 10.

Secularism

“What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them? Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor.” (Ps 8:5-6) In Schmemmann’s view of humanity, he reveals the unique vocation of the human person who is called to transform [himself/herself] and the world into communion with God.

First of all, [he/she] is ‘homo adorans’ ...the priest [who] stands in the center of the world and unifies it in [the] act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, [he/she] transforms [his/her] life, the one that [he/she] receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him.¹⁶

Such a world, full of the transparency of God and received as a gift, is a world where “God is all in all,” a world where men and women are eucharistic.¹⁷ It is a world opposed to the fallen world which “is characterized by a mounting rebellion against God and his Kingdom;”¹⁸ a world destined for *theosis*.

Humanity, however, and not God, argues Schmemmann, “has become the measure of all things”¹⁹ and has lost its priestly power. Because of this state, humanity’s natural dependency on the world is no longer transformed into communion with God, but is directed to the world itself. Schmemmann argues, “The world is meaningful only when it is the ‘sacrament of God’s presence.’ ...Cut off from the source of life,”²⁰ it dies. Consequently, because the first humans chose sin, they lost their life as Eucharistic and their priestly power to transform the world into life. In their disregard for God, the first

¹⁶ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 16.

¹⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

²⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 17,

humans lost their natural dependency on the world as a means of union with their Creator, and became its slave. Schmemmann claims that their sin was thinking of God “in terms of religion” and the world as “material” rather than the means of communion with God. Secularism is of the same nature; reducing God to the sacred sphere, disconnected to life and its meaning.²¹ It is humanity’s deliberate return to the way of being before the Incarnation of the Son of God and the Paschal Mystery. Secularism is the refusal of redeemed humanity to fulfill [his/her] true identity as *homo adorans* and the choice to negate [his/her] call to deification.

The true nature of secularism, according to Schmemmann, is apparent in every facet of life today. Secularism is “above all a negation of worship,”²² a negation of the human person as a worshipping being, as “*homo adorans*,” the one for whom worship is the essential act which both “posits [his/her] humanity and fulfills it.”²³

[Secularism] is the rejection...of the words which ‘always, everywhere and for all’ were the true ‘epiphany’ of [humankind’s] relation to God, to the world and to [themselves]. “It is meet and right to sing of Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks to Thee, and to worship Thee in every place of Thy dominion...”²⁴

Secularism is a way of life which completely denies that the basic aspects of human existence, such as family, education, science, etc., are grounded in and connected to religious faith.²⁵ The secular world, with “its own values, principles and motivations”²⁶ is completely autonomous and different from religious values. In Schmemmann’s thinking,

²¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 16-18.

²² *Ibid.*, 118.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 173.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

secularism is “the peculiar disease of the society and culture to which we belong.”²⁷

Secularism is contrary to the true nature of the human person.

Schmemmann insists, however, that secularism “is by no means identical to atheism.”²⁸ Unlike atheistic societies such as Soviet Russia or Red China, whose ideologies simply replaced religion, American secularism “*accepts* religion as essential to [human]kind and at the same time it denies it is an integrated world-view permeating and shaping the whole life of humanity.”²⁹ There is a kind of preoccupation with the world, with society and with history that challenges the Western Church to re-orient Herself to the world.³⁰ A secularist is often a very religious person who is faithful to religious obligations and fulfills [his/her] expectations involving membership in a Church. A secularist may admit to God’s role in creation, to His intervention in the world, to life after death, and may even relate to God his fundamental hopes for justice and equality for all persons. Schmemmann notes that a secularist may even “refer [his/her] secularism to God, making it ‘religious’—the object of ecclesiastical programs and ecumenical projects, the theme of Church assemblies and the subject matter of ‘theology.’”³¹ The irony exists in the disconnection between outward religious practices and the motivating values of success, status, security, affluence, etc. This is not to suggest hypocrisy, rather, it points to the rootedness of today’s understanding of religion and its purpose in life from a “secularistic world-view.”³² The vision of humanity and the world is “understood,

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 124.

²⁹ Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 173.

³⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979): 58.

³¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 124.

³² Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 174.

experienced, and acted upon in its own immanent terms and for its own immanent sake.”³³ In a secularist society, religion is part of the way of life; however, religion finds no place in its philosophy of life.³⁴

A secularist philosophy of religion accepts religion on its own terms and assigns a function to it. Consequently, religion itself is changed in ways that promote secularistic values and assists in attaining them. A familiar term adopted by this type of society is the word, “help.” It “helps” to have religion; it “helps” to go to Church; it “helps” to pray.³⁵ Pointing to a problem that is apparent in American Christianity tainted by secularism, Schmemmann quotes W. Herberg.³⁶ Both share the opinion that secularism actually generates “religiosity” and that America is at the same time the most secularized society of our time and the most religious one.³⁷

America...seems to be at once the most religious and the most secular of nations... Every aspect of contemporary religious life reflects this paradox: pervasive secularism amid mounting religiosity...The influx of members into churches and the increased readiness of Americans to identify themselves in religious terms certainly appears to stand in contrast to the way Americans seem to think and feel about matters central to the faith they possess...³⁸

In fact, notes Schmemmann, their values and convictions stand “at the opposite pole from the whole ‘ethos’ of the Gospel, the Creed, the Incarnation, and Christ’s death, resurrection and glorification.”³⁹ Humanity and the world become the terms of reference for this philosophy that has religion at its service.

³³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*. 124.

³⁴ Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 174.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, 22.

³⁸ Herberg, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 174.

³⁹ Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 173.

A non-secularistic society derives “its total ‘vision’ of the world from religion.”⁴⁰ As the ultimate criterion of all life and a “supreme term of reference,”⁴¹ it serves to constantly challenge and evaluate humanity and society to become its “philosophy of life.”⁴² It is founded on the basic principle that God is the cause and principle of the world and everything in it. Orthodoxy of the past was immersed in a non-secularistic society. Christianity touched all aspects of life, shaping it as a moral compass that constantly evaluates and challenges the world.⁴³

Eastern Christianity, in its traditions and vision of humanity and the world, is “radically incompatible...[and] diametrically opposed”⁴⁴ to secularism. Eastern Christianity is a way of life in Christ that adheres to the Truth⁴⁵ and acknowledges the Kingdom as the ultimate content and term of reference.⁴⁶ Like the early Christians who understood the Kingdom of God as “that which *has come*, is *present now* and *shall come at the end*,” today’s Eastern Christians confess the presence of God’s Kingdom in the Church and her sacraments, and in this very world.⁴⁷ All of life is received as God’s gift given to humanity to be sanctified and deified through the Church and her sacramental life. True human nature and human destiny is manifested in the “*homo adorans*.”

If the world, in Eastern Christian understanding, is not the ultimate term of reference, yet it is the sphere in which the Kingdom of God is present, how must one

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁵ Schmemann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America III: The Spiritual Problem,” 175.

⁴⁶ Schmemann, *Church, World, Mission*, 28.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 29.

understand the world? Schmemmann posits that the world is the “sacrament of the Kingdom.”⁴⁸

It is an epiphany of God, a means of His revelation, presence and power...it speaks of Him and is in itself an essential means both of knowledge of [God] and communion with Him, and to be so is its true nature and its ultimate destiny.⁴⁹

Created by God as good, the world is to be transformed so that the Kingdom of God is actualized and God becomes “all in all things.”⁵⁰ The world is given to humankind as a gift of God to be the object of its care. When the world becomes an end in itself, opaque to its transcendent destiny as oriented to the Kingdom of God, then it becomes a sphere of absurdity and death.⁵¹ Only when Christian life is focused on the Kingdom of God will secularism be uprooted so that the faithful will be immersed in the knowledge and love of God⁵² as revealed and manifested in the world. When the world is perceived and experienced as a manifestation of God, when its sacramental character has been acknowledged, then worship becomes the essential act of humanity whereby the human person encounters the source and possibility of knowledge of God that leads to union with Him.

Schmemmann identifies three dimensions of worship. First of all, worship is cosmic.⁵³ All of created matter (e.g., water, oil, bread, wine, etc.) is essential to knowledge of God and union with Him. Communion with God through “matter...reveals the true meaning of matter, i.e., of the world itself.”⁵⁴ Even the human body depends on

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 149.

⁴⁹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 120.

⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, 149.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 40.

⁵³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 120, 123.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

the world to express itself and to live out its relationship to the world.⁵⁵ Secondly, worship is historical. It is done in time, giving meaning and renewal to time⁵⁶ and relating all worship to the liturgy of time.⁵⁷ To say that the world is sacramental, therefore, is to reveal its true nature, meaning and vocation. It is to admit that the essential act of the human person is to worship.

Being the epiphany of God, worship is thus the epiphany of the world; being communion with God, it is the only true communion with the world; being knowledge of God, it is the ultimate fulfillment of all human knowledge.⁵⁸

To perceive one's relationship to the world in this light sets the human person on the path to act in accordance with [his/her] nature as "*homo adorans*." Thirdly, and above all, worship is eschatological. Although a universal phenomenon, worship done in a Christian setting embraces the mystery of the Incarnation. Christ is "the ultimate epiphany of [humankind] as a worshiping being, the fulness of God's manifestation and presence by means of the world."⁵⁹ Taking the very symbols of this world, the bread and the wine, and lifting them out of this world, the Eucharistic community, in the Holy Spirit, ascends to participate in the Kingdom,⁶⁰ giving to the Church's liturgy its eschatological dimension. Thus, true worship embraces the whole cosmos as sacramental, it sanctifies and gives meaning to time as the age of the Spirit, and directs itself to the Kingdom of God.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 121, 123.

⁵⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Theology," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XVI no.1 (Spring 1972): 91.

⁵⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 121.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

Secularism denies the sacramentality of the world and humanity's nature as a worshipping being. This refusal attacks worship at its foundation as cosmic, historical and eschatological. What will become of creation if it cannot be assumed into Christ? What will happen to time if Christ cannot draw it to Himself? What will be the destiny of humanity if it is not able to share in the Kingdom of God?⁶¹ Schmemmann's message is clear. The promise of the "great heresy of our time," secularism, is a definitive "darkness, absurdity and death."⁶² Schmemmann beckons the Church to overcome secularism "by truth."⁶³ He writes:

The Kingdom of God must become, as was the reality in the early Church, the value of all values, the object of its faith, hope and love, the content of its prayer, 'Thy Kingdom come.'⁶⁴

Without the Kingdom of God as the ultimate term of reference, it is impossible for humanity to realize its true nature as *homo adorans*.

Liturgical Unconsciousness

The pervasive secularist worldview is most acutely manifested in the manner in which the faithful approach the Church's liturgical life. As Schmemmann indicates, the liturgy is the "locus theologicus par excellence"⁶⁵ that manifests the faith of the Church and reveals her Truth.⁶⁶ Theology must be made accountable to provide for its people the

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² *Ibid.*, 124.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, "Prayer, Liturgy and Renewal," *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XIV no.1 (Spring 1969): 10.

⁶⁵ W. Jardine Grisbrooke and Alexander Schmemmann, "Debate on the Liturgy," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 13 no.4 (1969): 219.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

true content of eternal life.⁶⁷ This is the true function of the liturgy, “to express, to manifest and to fulfill the faith of the Church.”⁶⁸ However, it is Schmemmann’s concern that the centrality of the liturgical experience has ceased to form and inform Christian life. He articulates the core of the problem:

What is more serious, however, is the fact that the liturgy—central as it may be within the activities of the Church—has ceased to be connected with virtually all other aspects of the Church’s life; to inform, shape and guide the ecclesiastical consciousness as well as the “worldview” of the Christian community. One may be deeply attached to the “ancient and colorful rites”...and, at the same time, completely fail to see in them, in the totality of the Church’s *leitourgia*, an all-embracing vision of life, a powerful means to judge, inform and transform the whole of existence, a ‘philosophy of life’ shaping and challenging all our ideas, attitudes and actions.⁶⁹

The influence of secularism is obvious. When one’s worldview is not shaped by the liturgical experience of the Church, there is no connection between what is accomplished in the liturgy and life itself. Worship becomes obligatory and ceases to manifest true human nature.

It is clear that Schmemmann sees in this liturgical crisis a double crisis of theology, given his conviction that theology must have its source in the liturgy. It is a crisis that has come as a consequence of the disengagement of the *lex orandi* from the *lex credendi*⁷⁰ and their alienation from the life of the Church.⁷¹ Its gravity, according to Schmemmann, is causing the life of the Church to “drift away from its foundations.”⁷²

⁶⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 50.

⁶⁸ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, *Debate on the Liturgy*, 217.

⁶⁹ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition*, 51-52.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.* 53.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁷² Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Tradition*, 52.

Like Florovsky, Lossky and Staniloae, Schmemmann attributes the origin of this crisis to a post-patristic “western captivity”⁷³ of the Eastern theological mind. Coined “pseudomorphosis” by Florovsky, it implies that the Church of the East adopted the thought forms and categories of the Church of the West regarding the nature, structure and method of theology.⁷⁴ According to Schmemmann, the Western view was intent on constructing an objective theology built on clearly defined propositions with no reference to experience.⁷⁵ Unlike the theology of the East that characterized the patristic age, Schmemmann submits that the West developed a theology whose source relied on “scriptural, patristic, and conciliar” texts rather than on the lived experience of the faith of the Church in her liturgy.⁷⁶ Schmemmann argues that the Church is the lived experience of the reality of the saving events of Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. Theology must remain a faithful witness to these events that comprise the content of the faith.⁷⁷ Schmemmann posits the danger inherent to theology when texts become the “*loci theoligici*”⁷⁸ separating theology from its liturgical source.⁷⁹ Henceforth, theologians of the East referred to this approach as scholastic theology.

Schmemmann claims that scholastic theology is responsible for the divorce of theology from the liturgical experience. He writes:

In early times, the Church knew full well that the *lex credendi*...and the *lex orandi*... were inseparable and that they mutually substantiated each other...⁸⁰

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Theology*, 90.

⁷⁸ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, *Debate on the Liturgy*, 220.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 13.

The scholastic approach, according to Schmemmann's thinking, considers worship to be the object of theology rather than its source. In his words:

But theology constructed on western scholastic models is completely uninterested in worship as it is performed by the Church and in the logic and "order" proper to it. Proceeding from its own abstract presuppositions, this theology decides a priori what is "important" and what is "secondary." And it turns out, in the final analysis, that what is deemed 'secondary' as having no theological interest, is precisely worship itself, the very activity by which the Church actually lives, in all its complexity and diversity.⁸¹

Schmemmann is so convinced of the devastating effects of this approach that he predicts systemic consequences to the whole of theology:

By 'scholastic' we mean, in this instance, not a definite school or period in the history of theology, but a theological structure which existed in various forms in both the West and the East, and in which all 'organic' connection with worship is severed. Theology here has an independent, rational status; it is a search for a system of consistent categories and concepts: *intellectus fidei*. The position of worship in relation to theology is reversed: from a source it becomes an object, which has to be defined and evaluated within the accepted categories (e.g., definitions of sacraments). Liturgy supplies theology with 'data,' but the method of dealing with these data is independent of any liturgical context. Moreover, the selection and classification of the data themselves are already a 'product' of the accepted conceptual structure.⁸²

The whole of Schmemmann's argument against western scholasticism and captivity rests upon this point. This Western approach undermines Schmemmann's theory of the holistic nature of the liturgy.

Schmemmann believes that this influence on theological thought has produced unsettling results in both traditions. The Eastern Church claims that, for the most part, the liturgical tradition has been ignored as a *locus theologicus*.⁸³ Liturgical experience suffered from a loss of its nature as the revelation and manifestation of the presence of

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² W. Jardine Grisbrooke, "An Orthodox Approach to Liturgical Theology: The Work of Alexander Schmemmann, *Studia Liturgica* 23 (1993): 143-144.

⁸³ Fisch, *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, 13.

God's Kingdom; "the witness and the participant of the saving event of Christ, of the new life in the Holy Spirit, of the presence in 'this world' of the Kingdom to come."

Ultimately, it was no longer regarded or experienced as the epiphany of the Church's faith; nor was it perceived as the reality of her experience as Church and, therefore, as the source of her theology.⁸⁴ Schmemmann argues that any reduction of the "*lex orandi* to 'cult'"⁸⁵ prevents an understanding of its relationship with theology.⁸⁶ According to Schmemmann, this was the cause of the crisis of liturgical misunderstanding⁸⁷ that was felt in both traditions.

At the heart of the teaching of the Eastern Fathers was an ecclesiological vision that regarded the Church as the "mystery of the new creation and ...the mystery of the Kingdom."⁸⁸ Its purpose was rooted in its very nature as the sacrament and epiphany of the new creation, the Kingdom of God. Within her *leitourgia*, the Church was informed of her cosmic and eschatological vocation; She was empowered to carry it through; and, She fulfilled her identity as the Sacrament of the Kingdom, a realm of grace and communion with God.⁸⁹ Since the faith of the Church was a living faith, it was manifested in her relationship to the events that identified her members as the Body of Christ. More than just an assertion to doctrine, the Church celebrated the reality of the life, death, resurrection, glorification and ascension of Jesus Christ. In this way, She was

⁸⁴ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Theology*, 91.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, *Debate on the Liturgy*, 219.

⁸⁸ Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, 136.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

not only a “witness” but a “participant” in these events and their life-giving and life-transfiguring reality⁹⁰ within the mystery of the Kingdom of God.

Each time the Church assembles to baptize, to proclaim the Word, or to share the Eucharist, She fulfills her very nature and vocation to make all things new in Christ and the Holy Spirit and to manifest the Kingdom of God. By relating all time and all matter to Christ who fills all things with Himself, the Church becomes the true epiphany of her faith, revealing her *lex credendi* in her *lex orandi*.⁹¹ Her eschatological nature is revealed in the communion of the Holy Spirit, Who, as the source of her life, sanctifies and deifies the Church so that She may manifest and express herself as the presence of the Kingdom of God.⁹²

The liturgical tradition of the Church was shaped by the *lex orandi* of the Lord’s Day, the Eucharist and the coming together of the faithful as the *ecclesia*. Fundamental to this experience was the shared understanding of the relationship of the world, the Church and the Kingdom that was revealed in this gathering. Schmemmann believes that over time, as the *lex credendi* began to be disassociated with the *lex orandi*, “the Lord’s Day [became] simply the Christian form of the Sabbath; the Eucharist [became] one ‘means of grace’ among many; and the Church [became] an institution with sacraments, but no longer sacramental in her very nature...”⁹³ Ruptures of ecclesial and sacramental understanding began to crack the very foundation of the *ecclesia* of the first Christian community.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 136-137.

⁹³ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, *Debate on the Liturgy*, 220.

Schmemmann claims that the westernized approach to sacramental theology neglected the cosmic and eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist. The most serious omission, believes Schmemmann, is that of the eschatological nature of the liturgy, “its relation to and dependence upon the central object of Christian faith...the Kingdom of God.”⁹⁴

The Eucharist ceases to be experienced as the sacrament of the Church, of her very nature as passage and ascension into the Kingdom of God. Theology exhausts itself in purely formal and truly irrelevant definitions of sacrifice and transubstantiation, while piety little by little subordinates Eucharist to its individualistic and pietistic demands.⁹⁵

One reason for the lack of eschatological understanding is the failure to appreciate the interdependence and organic connection of all the elements of the Eucharistic ordo: the beauty of “its structure and rhythm..., its ineffable and celestial beauty, in its words, as well as its rites...”⁹⁶ The hymns, the icons, the rituals and the solemnity work together with time to link the liturgy of the Eucharist to matter and all of creation⁹⁷ as the assembly moves in its ascension to the mystery of the Kingdom of heaven. Like the entire *leitourgia* of the Church, the Eucharist is:

...to be the true epiphany of the new creation redeemed by Christ, the presence and power in this world of joy and peace in the Holy Spirit, of the new aeon of the Kingdom, and being all this, to be the source and the focus *par excellence* of the Church’s faith and theology.⁹⁸

Schmemmann argues that a wholistic approach to the Eucharistic liturgy guarantees that the cosmic and eschatological dimensions will be realized in their fullness.

⁹⁴ Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, 145.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 139.

Having identified the nature of the Eucharistic crisis and the powerful influence it has exerted on the liturgical consciousness of the Church, it is imperative to define the theological task that challenges the Church of the third millennium. Based on the spirit and vision of the Church of the first Christians, theology must reclaim its source as rooted in the Church's worship. It is within her Eucharistic *leitourgia* that the Church becomes who and what She truly is: the sacrament of the presence and manifestation of the Kingdom of God in this world. Theology must be "rooted...in the very experience of the Church," and *leitourgia* must be restored to its theological meaning, *lex credendi est lex orandi*, rescued from...superficial and... external reforms."⁹⁹ In this spirit, the Church will fulfill her mission as the "epiphany...of the eternal mystery of salvation...and by being this [will] reveal to [humanity] its true nature and destiny"¹⁰⁰ realized in the vocation to *theosis*. This way alone will offer the most meaningful solution to the ontological challenges that secularism and liturgical unconsciousness present to this age. In this spirit and from this vision, humanity will find its way back to God, called into being with Him to share in his divine life. "As *homo adorans*, the one for whom worship is the essential act, humanity will be both posited and fulfilled"¹⁰¹ and ecclesial identity and mission will be retrieved. The fully human person, created in the image of the Triune God to participate in divine plenitude will reach *theosis* and share in trinitarian *perichoresis*.

⁹⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, "Theology and Liturgy," *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 146.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 118.

Theosis is Rooted in Perichoresis

The true destiny of the human person is to participate in the very life from which [he/she] receives [his/her] nature. Created in the image of the Triune God, the human person is called to share in God's Being. Within the Trinity, God shares his being in the mutual indwelling of the divine Persons. The Eastern Fathers of the Church termed this ontological phenomenon περιχώρησις (*perichoresis*). This concept is found in the Gospel of John¹⁰² and was first used to describe the unity of the human and divine natures of Christ. Later, *perichoresis* served to address the question of the Triune God,¹⁰³ as well as to refute the heresies of the time. The term provided sound theological articulation of the concept of mutual indwelling within a trinitarian, christological and soteriological framework. The doctrine of *theosis* finds its origins within trinitarian *perichoresis*.

Trinitarian Perichoresis

The Incarnate *Logos* of God discloses to Philip what will later emerge in the language of the Greek Fathers as the doctrine of *perichoresis*, a teaching that describes relationality in terms of mutually shared being;¹⁰⁴ a term which has its source in the divine nature.¹⁰⁵ "Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father in me? The words that I speak to you, I do not speak on my own. The Father who dwells in me is doing his works." (Jn 14:9) Philip's desire to see the Father is met by Jesus with a call to

¹⁰² Verna Harrison, "Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 no.1 (1991): 59.

¹⁰³ Randall E. Otto, "The Use and Abuse of *Perichoresis* in Recent Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 no.1 (2001): 370.

¹⁰⁴ Randall E. Otto, "The Use and Abuse of *Perichoresis* in Recent Theology," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 54 no.1 (2001): 366-367.

¹⁰⁵ Verna Harrison, *Perichoresis in the Greek Fathers*, *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 35 no.1 (1991): 60.

faith. “He who has seen me has seen the Father...” (Jn 14:9) St. Gregory of Nyssa explains this relationship:

The Son is so completely the One who takes the Father’s place and reveals him, though always by virtue of the Father’s will, that St. Gregory calls the Son another “self” of the Father. But he who sees the Son, sees the Father, the Father has begotten another self of his own..., not by going outside himself, but by revealing himself wholly in this other. The Saviour says: ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’ (Jn 14:9)¹⁰⁶

There is no other “more privileged access to the Father than through faith in Jesus Christ...The intimacy of Jesus’ relationship with the Father, ‘I am in the Father and the Father in me,’...is the object of this faith.”¹⁰⁷ Jesus, the Christ, is at once the revealer and the revelation itself:

Jesus’ affirmation, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father,” (Jn 14:19) defines the nature of the revelation He brings. The encounter with his person *is* the encounter with God the Father...The only access available to anyone...is in and through the ‘flesh’ which the Word became.¹⁰⁸

When John the Evangelist speaks of Jesus as “the Way, the Truth and the Life,” (Jn 14:6) he asserts that Jesus is the revelation of God. “Everyone who sees the Son and believes will have eternal life.” (Jn 6:40)¹⁰⁹ St. John’s Gospel is the revelation of the basis of humanity’s vocation to *theosis*. Faith in Jesus Christ is the access to the divine life of the Trinity in which all are called to share. Jesus’ encounter with Philip is the revelation of the mystery of trinitarian *perichoresis*.

¹⁰⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, “Contra Eunomium” 2, *Patrologia Graeca* 45, 493B. ed. W. Jaeger, *Gregorii Nysseni Opera* II, Leiden 1960, 337; quoted in Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 89.

¹⁰⁷ Stanley B. Marrow, *The Gospel of John* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 254.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 253.

¹⁰⁹ Pheme Perkins, “The Gospel According to John,” in *The New Jerome Biblical Commentary*, ed, Raymond E. Brown et al., (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1990), 974.

At the heart of this relationship of the mutual abiding of Jesus “in the Father and the Father in [him],” is the obedience of Jesus to the will of the Father.¹¹⁰ It expresses the intimacy of their relationship that is grounded in the life they share¹¹¹ and models the promised relationship available to all believers. “I speak to you, I do not speak on my own, the Father who dwells in me is doing his works.” (Jn 14:10) The divine economy of God is manifested through this work of the Son carried out in obedience to the will of the Father. Obedience manifests love, which is intrinsic to the mutual indwelling of the divine Persons who “give themselves to each other in love.” Thus...the Father gives all that He is to the Son...” and “in return the Son gives all that He is to the Father...”¹¹² The mystery of *perichoresis* reveals that obedience is a manifestation of love.

Jesus’ revelation of the mystery of the mutual indwelling of the trinity of Persons brings with it an invitation to faith. “Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me, or else, believe because of the works themselves.” (Jn 14:11) In 356, Western theologian and Bishop Hilary of Poitiers, France (312-368) was exiled to Phrygia in the East for refusing to condemn St. Athanasius’s definition of the Word as consubstantial with the Father. During his banishment, Hilary learned about the heresies surrounding Christ’s divinity and wrote *De Trinitate*.¹¹³ This work asserts the inexorable role of faith in the confession of the mutual indwelling of the Father and the Son:

It does not seem possible that the very thing which is in another is at the same time outside of it, and since those things which we are discussing cannot exist apart from themselves, and if they are to preserve the number and position which they are, it

¹¹⁰ Marrow, 253.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 260.

¹¹² Harrison, 64.

¹¹³ St. Hilary of Poitiers, *The Trinity: Saint Hilary, Bishop of Poitiers*, trans. Stephen McKenna, C.S.S.R. (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1954), v-viii.

seems that they cannot mutually contain each other, so that he who contains something else within himself and remains in this position and always remains outside of it can likewise be always present within him whom he contains within himself. Human knowledge will certainly never grasp these truths...¹¹⁴

Hilary's conclusion is testimony that human reason alone is unable to fathom the depths of divine truth. Human knowledge reflects a fallen humanity that has forfeited its capacity to know God.

John's pericope also contains Jesus' revelation of the Paraclete:

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Paraclete to be with you always, the Spirit of Truth, which the world cannot accept because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it because it remains with you and will be in you.
(Jn 14: 16-17)

The evangelist describes the mission and activity of the Holy Spirit in terms identical to those used about the mission and activity of Jesus. He comes from the Father (Jn 13:3); He is sent by the Father (Jn 14:17); He teaches (Jn 14:26); He cannot be received by the world (Jn 14:17); He does not speak by his own authority (Jn 12:49); and He dwells with the believers (Jn 14:25)¹¹⁵ The Scriptures reveal the Holy Spirit as divine Person, coequal and coeternal, whose mission and activity are in accord with the economy of God. Most importantly, they reveal the mystery of God as divine Trinity.

Having shared the mystery of divine trinitarian love with his disciples, Jesus offers a share in this love to all who believe in Him and obey his teachings. "Whoever has my commandments and observes them is the one who loves me. And whoever loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and reveal myself to him." (Jn 14:21) Obedience to Jesus' revelation and to his will fulfills this promise¹¹⁶ and delivers the true

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁵ Marrow, 258.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 261.

meaning of Jesus' loving obedience to the Father's will. "...On that day, you will realize that I am in the Father and you are in me and I in you." (Jn 14:20) That day will bring to light, not only the intimacy of Jesus' union with the Father, but his union with all who believe in him, love him and have observed his commands.¹¹⁷ This is the true meaning of creation: Jesus comes so that humanity might become deified through Him.

How has this mystery of the mutual indwelling of the trinity of Divine Persons been expressed in the teaching of the Church? The Gospel of John exposes the trinitarian concept of the "interpenetration and reciprocal presence"¹¹⁸ that is "ontologically rooted in shared being."¹¹⁹ Much later, Greek patristic writings referred to the mutual indwelling as περιχω'ρησις. (to pass reciprocally) According to Harrison, St. Gregory Nazianzen (329-390ca) was the first to use this term theologically in reference to the divine and human natures in Christ.¹²⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor (580-662) later adopted it from Gregory's writings, using it in a christological and soteriological sense. An anonymous 7th century author, whom Harrison identifies as Pseudo-Cyril of Alexandria, "appears to have been the first to name [the mutual indwelling of the Trinity] as *perichoresis*."¹²¹ Over time, the term, *perichoresis* served to articulate the concept of mutually shared being in a trinitarian, christological and soteriological framework.

St. John of Damascus (665-749) contributed to the doctrinal development of *perichoresis*. Through his work, the concept was received in both the East and the

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 260

¹¹⁸ *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, 1991 ed., s.v. "*Perichoresis*, Trinitarian," by Gerald O'Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Garrugia, S.J.

¹¹⁹ Otto, 368.

¹²⁰ Harrison, 55.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

West.¹²² In his seminal treatise, *De Fide Orthodoxa*, John addresses the trinitarian mystery. Four major sections comprise this work: 1) the oneness and threeness of God and the difference between begetting and creating; 2) the nature of divine generation and procession; 3) the Holy Spirit and the nature of his procession; the simple *ousia* which exists in three hypostases; and 4) the nature of the divine unity, including the use of the term *perichoresis* for the first time.¹²³ In chapter 8 of *De Fide Orthodoxa*, John addresses the interpenetration of the divine persons. Using the language of Chalcedon and the Cappadocian Fathers, he refines the development of the doctrine which has since remained in its teaching:

For there is one essence, one goodness, one virtue, one intent, one operation, one power—one and the same, not three similar one to another, but one and the same motion of the three Persons. And the oneness of each is not less with the others than it is with itself, that is to say, the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost are one in all things except the being unbegotten, the being begotten and the procession. It is by thought that the distinction is perceived. For we know one God and Him in the properties of fatherhood, and sonship, and procession only. The difference we conceive of according to cause and effect and the perfection of the Person, that is to say, His manner of existing. For with the uncircumscribed Godhead, we cannot speak of a difference in will, or judgment, or operation, or virtue, or any other whatsoever of those things which in us give rise to a definite real distinction. For that reason, we do not call the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost three Gods, but one God, the Holy Trinity, in whom the Son and the Holy Ghost are related to one cause without any composition or blending...For they are united, as we said, so as not to be confused, but to adhere closely together, and they have their circumincession one in the other without any blending or mingling and without change or division in substance such as the division held by Arius. Thus, must one put it concisely, the Godhead is undivided in things divided, just as in three suns joined together without any intervening interval, there is one blending and the union of the light.¹²⁴

¹²² *Ibid.*, 53.

¹²³ Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 104.

¹²⁴ St. John Damascene, *De Fide Orthodoxa* I:8, in *Saint John of Damascus: Writings* 37, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, (New York: Fathers of the Church, Inc., 1958), 186-187.

Clearly, John has provided a systematic treatise of *perichoresis* that substantiates trinitarian theology and forms the foundation for later developments in christology and soteriology.

Louth notes the trinitarian context in John's use of *perichoresis*. Based on the words of Christ, "I in the Father and the Father in me," (Jn 14:10) *perichoresis* articulates the "being in one another" of the divine hypostasis. It expresses the truth about the Godhead that:

The distinction of hypostases does not detract from the unity of the Godhead: the hypostaseis can be discerned to be distinct in their several 'modes of existence': but in reality they are wholly at one, and that unity between the *hypostaseis* is manifest in interpenetration or coinherence, *perichoresis*.¹²⁵

Ultimately, the language of *perichoresis* affirms the love of the Divine Persons as a unity in trinity.

John's treatment of *perichoresis* embraces the thought of St. Cyril and St. Gregory of Nazianzus. Sections of St. Cyril's *De Trinitate* provide material that stresses the identity of essence in the hypostases while observing the difference in the Divine Persons relations of origin. They "possess coinherence in each other...though without confusion or division."¹²⁶ John elaborates Cyril's use of *perichoresis* by accenting "the oneness of God in essence, divinity, power, will, energy, beginning, authority, dominion and sovereignty; a oneness that is made known in three perfect subsistences which are united without confusion and divided without separation."¹²⁷ He posits that God's unity is based on the identity of essence and "ensured by the *perichoresis* of the three persons, made one not so as to commingle, but so as to cleave to each other, having their being in

¹²⁵ Louth, 113.

¹²⁶ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *De Trinitate* 10, 77. 1144B; quoted in Harrison, 59.

¹²⁷ Otto, 370.

each other without any coalescence or commingling.”¹²⁸ This point would be further developed in the work of St. Maximus the Confessor. References to Gregory of Nazianzen are also lodged within John’s text. They “emphasize oneness and threeness in God equally...¹²⁹ and speak of God’s undivided division using the metaphor of the three conjoined suns.¹³⁰ Clearly, John’s text makes a significant contribution to the theological development of trinitarian *perichoresis*.

By definition, *perichoresis*, or the Latin *circumincessio*, describes:

The ‘necessary being-in-one-another or circumincession of the three divine Persons of the Trinity because of the single divine essence, the eternal procession of Son from the Father and of the Spirit from the Father and (through) the Son, and the fact that the three persons are distinguished solely by the relations of opposition between them.’¹³¹

Twentieth century Orthodox theologian, Dumitru Staniloae, elaborates on the notion of the “reciprocal interiority” of trinitarian *perichoresis*. He writes:

...there is in fact a certain interior presence of the one within the other as a prerequisite for any ‘coming to rest’ of the one in the other or of any ‘passage’ of the one through the other. Thus with respect to the Holy Trinity, *perichoresis* must mean *a fortiori* a passage of the Spirit through the Son as one who is proceeding from the Father and returning to him. Similarly, the Son passes through the Spirit as one begotten by the Father and returning to him. It should also be observed that each divine Person manifests the divine fullness in a form which shows the effects of this passage through the others and of his interior relation with the others. Consequently, on account of these interior relations with the others, no divine Person is ever, either in the Church as a whole or in the individual believer, without the other divine Persons or without the particular characteristics of the others.¹³²

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ Harrison, 59.

¹³⁰ Gregory of Nazianzen, “Oration 39, 11” *Patrologia Graeca* 36. 345C-D; quoted in Harrison, 59.

¹³¹ *Dictionary of Theology*, 2nd ed., s.v. “*Perichoresis*,” by Karl Rahner, ed.; quoted in Otto, 366.

¹³² Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1980), 38-39.

Perichoresis is the foundation for the ultimate destiny of the human person. The unfathomable, incomprehensible depths of the love of God call out to creation to share in this divine mystery in eternal communion.

Christological *Perichoresis*

Historically, *perichoresis* was first used in a theological sense by Gregory of Nazianzen to express “the intimate communion of the two natures of Christ.”¹³³ Gregory writes in *Epistle 101*, “Just as the natures are κίρυμε’υου (mixed), the names περιχωρουσιν (pass reciprocally) into each other by the principle of this συμφιάς (coalescence)”¹³⁴ Harrison appropriated this interchange of names to mean “grounded ontologically in the mutual interpenetration of natures.”¹³⁵ Otto interprets Gregory’s text to mean that “*Perichoresis* ...signifies the attribution of one nature’s prerogatives to the other...but not commingling of these natures.”¹³⁶ In this sense, argues Harrison, “*perichoresis* indicates the exchange of titles and hence of activities and attributes that is termed...*communicatio idiomatum*,” an expression used later by St. John of Damascus and St. Maximus the Confessor.¹³⁷

John of Damascus gives priority to trinitarian *perichoresis*, both ontologically and conceptually, yet he perceives christological *perichoresis* to follow the same pattern as trinitarian *perichoresis* and to be rooted in it. He writes;

As in the Holy Trinity, the three hypostases, through natural identity and coinherence in each other ... are and are called one God, so in our Lord Jesus Christ the two natures, through hypostatic identity and coinherence in each other...are one

¹³³ Otto, 368.

¹³⁴ Grégoire de Nazianze, “Lettres Théologiques,” *Sources Chrétiennes* 208 (Paris, 1974), 48; quoted in Harrison, 55.

¹³⁵ Harrison, 55.

¹³⁶ Otto, 368.

¹³⁷ Harrison, 55-56.

Son.¹³⁸

John also observes that both symmetry and asymmetry exist in the *perichoresis* of the divine and human natures in Christ. Adhering to the teaching of the “radical transcendence of the divine nature and its inaccessibility to created beings,” John attempts “to preserve God’s impassibility.”¹³⁹ At times, he falls victim to a reductionist understanding of christological *perichoresis* which “risks emptying the Incarnation of meaning and content.”¹⁴⁰

Although we say that the natures of the Lord coinhere in each other (περιχωεῖν εἰς ἄλληλῃ λαιζ), we know that this coinherence (περιχωρησιζ) arises out of the divine nature. For this last pervades all things and penetrates (περιχωρεῖ) as it wishes, but nothing pervades and penetrates through it. And it grants the flesh participation in its own splendors while remaining impassible and without participating in the passions (or passivity) of the flesh. For, if the sun grants us participation in its own energies yet does not participate in ours, then how much more so the Lord and creator of the sun?¹⁴¹

Divine impassibility presented a major roadblock in John’s christological development of *perichoresis*. Although he was able to formulate a sound synthesis regarding trinitarian *perichoresis*, more work needed to be done in articulating the divinizing character of the Incarnation.

Maximus the Confessor is credited with elaborating the doctrine of *perichoresis* as an expression “of the kind of *communicatio* relationship which exists between [the] divine and human natures in Christ.”¹⁴² Thunberg notes that Maximus is “the first Christian writer who has given the term *perichoresis* a central position within

¹³⁸ St. John of Damascus, *De Fide contra Nestorianos* 36; quoted in Harrison, 61.

¹³⁹ Harrison, 63.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3.7: quoted in Harrison, 62.

¹⁴² Lars Thunberg, *Microcosm and Mediator: The Theological Anthropology of Maximus the Confessor* (Copenhagen: Lund, 1965), 23.

Orthodox christology.”¹⁴³ Maximus was influenced by Gregory Nazianzen’s *Epistle* 101

which concerns:

...the inhabitation of Christ and about a certain ‘mixture’ (χρᾶσις) of the two natures and their attributes...and penetrating (περιχωρῶν) into each other on account of their mutual adhesion (συμφύτα).¹⁴⁴

Thunberg argues that in this context, one may conclude that “the mutual application of attributes is seen more as a consequence of the *perichoresis* than as the cause.”¹⁴⁵

Consequently, he speculates that Maximus was driven to develop the concept of *perichoresis* more as an expression of activity rather than the “mutual application of divine attributes.”¹⁴⁶ Thunberg summarizes Maximus’ christological *perichoresis*:

The divine energy which in accordance with the economy of salvation is clearly presented as taking the initiative, and the human which, according to this divine plan, is entirely...united with the divine ‘through mutual adhesion and penetration.’¹⁴⁷

As Thunberg indicates, “adhesion” is to be understood as “the relationship established between the two natures [of Christ] through the Incarnation.”¹⁴⁸ He defines “penetration,” “as a consequence of this relationship--their mutual penetration.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, *perichoresis* describes the activity of the two natures of Christ towards each other united with a single “direction of intention.”¹⁵⁰ Maximus characterizes this unity as “unconfused”¹⁵¹ because it is never a unity “of nature.”¹⁵² He offers the analogy of a union between fire and iron:

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴⁴ Gregory Nazianzen, “Epistle 101,” *Patrologia Graeca* 37, 181C; quoted in Thunberg, 26.

¹⁴⁵ Thunberg, 26.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theological et oeconomica* 7: *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 85D-88A; quoted in Thunberg, 30.

¹⁴⁸ Thunberg, 30.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 31.

Iron glows in the fire but remains what it is in itself. In one and the same hypostasis, iron and fire are found together, but the piece of iron effects exactly that which is in accordance with its own nature, as well as that which belongs to both, i.e., it glows, but in a way which is proper to iron alone.¹⁵³

As Thunberg notes, human nature is inclined toward the divine.¹⁵⁴ The inseparable union of the two natures in Christ occurs without loss or confusion of the differences of nature.¹⁵⁵ Maximus' teachings are a dramatic advancement in christological *perichoresis*.

Faithful to the teachings of Chalcedon that affirm the redemptive unity of the human and divine natures in Christ, Maximus believes that the union of the two natures is based on a certain polarity between them as human and divine.¹⁵⁶ Von Balthasar would later describe this relationship with his formula of *entsprechungsformel*, also referred to as the *tantum quantum* formula of reciprocity.¹⁵⁷ Maximus points out in *Ambigua*:

[God and humankind] stand in relation to each other in a particular polarity, a relationship which finds its classical expression in the idea of the imago Dei...that God makes himself [human] for the sake of love for [humankind]...so far as [humankind], enabled by God, has deified [itself]...¹⁵⁸

According to Maximus, then, a relationship of polarity exists between God and humanity such that “the incarnation of God and the deification of humanity condition each other

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theological et oeconomica* 8; *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 108C; quoted in Thunberg, 31.

¹⁵³ Maximus the Confessor, *Opuscula theological et oeconomica* 16; *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 189C-192A; quoted in Thunberg, 31.

¹⁵⁴ Thunberg, 31.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁵⁷ Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Kosmische Liturgie* 2nd ed. (Einsiedeln, 1961), 277; quoted in Thunberg, 32.

¹⁵⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1113BC; quoted in Thunberg, 32-33.

mutually.”¹⁵⁹ This expression of reciprocity is intended by Maximus’ use of the term *perichoresis* and is based on the terms of Chalcedon.¹⁶⁰ He writes:

[Humankind] becomes god, as it were, in proportion to God’s becoming [human], and [he/she] is elevated for God’s sake to the extent which God has emptied himself, without change, and accepted human nature.¹⁶¹

Maximus’ formula of reciprocity proved to be the most substantial argument in formulating a teaching of christological *perichoresis*.

Soteriological *Perichoresis*

Maximus extends his usage of *perichoresis* to describe the union of humanity with divinity. As Otto states, “to include the energies of the incarnate *Logos* which interpenetrate the believer until [he/she] returns to [his/her] origin by an energy which constitutes the deification of the saints.”¹⁶² Thus, he uncovers a new and broader formulation of *perichoresis* that addresses the concept in a soteriological context, based on the christological paradigm. This development revealed the organic link between *theosis* and *perichoresis*:

The soul’s salvation is the consummation of faith. This consummation is the revelation of what has been believed. Revelation is the inexpressible interpenetration (περιχωρήσις) of the believer with (or toward, πρός) the object of belief and takes place according to each believer’s degree of faith. Through that penetration the believer returns to his origin. The return is the fulfillment of desire. Fulfillment of desire is ever-active repose in the object of desire. Such repose is eternal uninterrupted enjoyment of this object. Enjoyment of this kind entails participation in supranatural divine realities. This participation consists in the participant becoming like that in which he participates. Such likeness involves, so far as this is possible, an identity with respect to energy between the participant and that in which he participates by virtue of the likeness. This identity with respect to

¹⁵⁹ Thunberg, 33.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁶¹ Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 60, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1385BC; quoted in Thunberg, 33.

¹⁶² Maximus the Confessor, *Capitulum Quinquies Centenorum Centuria*, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 1312A-B; quoted in Otto, 369.

energy constitutes the deification of the saints.¹⁶³

Maximus' reference to the likeness of participation quoted above is the actualization of *theosis*.

It is Harrison's view that humanity participates in the divine by an interpenetration initiated by God.¹⁶⁴ As Gregory of Nazianzen notes:

He takes on a strange form, bearing the whole of me in himself with what is mine, so as to consume the bad in himself, as fire does wax or the sun does the earth's mists, and I participate in what is his through the commingling (συ'γκρασις).¹⁶⁵

Harrison concludes that Maximus differentiates between soteriological and christological *perichoresis* in this fashion. Christological *perichoresis* involves a coinherence of the divine and human natures of Christ, while soteriological *perichoresis* includes an "identity of energy with God, as far as possible."¹⁶⁶ It is by virtue of divine energy, however, that the interpenetration of humanity with divinity is possible. The Incarnate *Logos* mediates the distance between humanity and divinity.

Finally, soteriological *perichoresis* concerns the cosmological consequences that result from the Incarnation. Maximus argues that the mutual interpenetration that occurs through grace between God and divinized creation effects and characterizes realities at every level of the created natural world. The hypostatic union in Christ establishes a reality between Creator and creation whereby the human person becomes, in Maximian terms, microcosm and cosmic mediator.¹⁶⁷ This theme is quite significant in Maximus'

¹⁶³ Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 608C-609B; quoted in Harrison, 57-58.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹⁶⁵ Gregory of Nazianzen, *Orations* 30.6, Galloway, *Discours* 27-31, 236; quoted in Harrison, 58. n.14.

¹⁶⁶ Harrison, 58.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

thinking. It implies an “interconnectedness and commingling”¹⁶⁸ among created things themselves as well as the mutual indwelling of God and creation.¹⁶⁹ Such mutual interpenetration of God and creation is rooted in and ensured by trinitarian *perichoresis*. John of Damascus articulates this relationship of the divine Persons in the following manner: “...one not so as to commingle but so as to cleave to each other, and they have their being in each other without any coalescence or commingling.”¹⁷⁰ Maximus’ insight teaches the Christian believer that “radically unequal levels of reality”¹⁷¹ can be united while preserving distinctiveness, and participate in a relationship of mutually shared being.¹⁷² Therefore, it is possible that the Creator and His created world can share a viable relationship, in spite of their radical inequality.

Jesus’ revelation to Philip, “...I am in the Father and the Father in me.” (Jn 14:9) challenged the Fathers to develop sound theological language to articulate the depth and meaning intended by these words. The resulting doctrine of *perichoresis* served to address the question of the “unity and distinction, stability and dynamism, symmetry and asymmetry”¹⁷³ in the Triune God, the Incarnate *Logos* and in all of creation. Jesus’ revelation of himself as “the Way, the Truth and the Life” (Jn 14:6) challenges all believers to acknowledge the power and the promise of the Incarnation by which humanity and all creation are drawn into an eternal trinitarian *perichoresis* of love.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 1.8; quoted in Otto, 370.

¹⁷¹ Harrison, 65.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 63.

Trinitarian *Perichoresis* and the Origin of Creation

The elaboration of the doctrine of *perichoresis* has encouraged theologians throughout the centuries to explore its implications for theology. Dumitru Staniloae was highly influenced by Maximus' work in this area. Based on Maximus' cosmology, this neopatristic theologian, according to Kallistos Ware, provides "a convincing theology of the world"¹⁷⁴ which he develops in his *Dogmatics* under the theme of cosmic transfiguration. Faithful to the tradition of the Eastern Fathers, Staniloae's theology is trinitarian. It treats of a loving and personal God while it strikes a complementary balance between the otherness yet nearness of God, in the spirit of the apophatic tradition of the East.¹⁷⁵ Staniloae's insights in this area have complemented his predecessor, Maximus, and have provided a theology of creation deeply rooted in the doctrines of *perichoresis* and *theosis*.

Staniloae describes the divinity of the Triune God in terms of love and eternal life. The Trinity of the perfect Persons is the true eternity. He writes, "The Trinity of the Perfect persons is the fullness; in fact, it explains everything, and remains eternally unchanged in its love."¹⁷⁶ Staniloae posits that eternal life abides in the "perfect communion between inexhaustible subjects."¹⁷⁷ A dynamic and eternal openness and movement towards the other implies that each divine Person has knowledge of the other in himself, a reciprocal interiority of the persons. Like the Eastern Fathers, who define

¹⁷⁴ Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 1: *The Experience of God*, with a foreword by Kallistos Ware (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1998), xxi.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

knowledge as the union of “the one who knows and the one who is known,”¹⁷⁸ Staniloae posits that knowledge is characteristic of the *perichoresis* of the divine Persons:¹⁷⁹

Knowledge is the loving reference of one subject to another subject... This... pole of perfect reference is possessed by God within himself. He refers to himself as to other persons and these persons refer one to the other reciprocally and perfectly. In his continuous movement to the Son who is in him, and in the continuous movement of the Son towards the Father, the Father knows himself in his reference to the Son, knowing the Son and knowing himself in the Son. The perfect knowledge or perfect omniscience of God consists in the fact that each divine person knows the other in himself, but in his quality as another person. Hence, each person himself knows and actualizes himself perfectly and eternally.¹⁸⁰

What causes this knowledge is the reciprocal interiority of the persons, or *perichoresis*. It is constituted by the total and infinite love and openness that each divine Person has for the other, “a total and infinite spiritual *perichoresis* of conscious love.”¹⁸¹ It is, continues Staniloae, divine life infinitely full of a love that is eternally present and inexhaustible.¹⁸² The effusive nature of God’s love that is inexhaustible and eternally full and present is the origin of creation. Staniloae posits the goodness of God, the “supra-existent Sun.”¹⁸³ He notes, “Through the rays of the goodness of the supra-existent Sun all things exist.”¹⁸⁴ The eternal, inexhaustible and infinite love of the Divine Persons of the Trinity effuses into creation. God’s goodness gives existence to all things *ex nihilo*.

Creation theology was enriched by the work of the early Fathers of the Church. Dionysius the Aeropagite, a disciple of St. Paul the Apostle, (Acts 17:34) does not distinguish or differentiate between God’s goodness and God’s love. Rather, he regards

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 203.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 238.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 238-239.

this goodness or love as a movement towards creation that has its basis in the movement of the love that exists in God.¹⁸⁵ He writes, “Precisely because God is the good in himself...the good through kindness, God has created the intelligible world and the perceptible world.”¹⁸⁶ Comparing God’s love to the sun and its rays, he offers this explanation of creation out of God’s goodness:

Just as the sun, without reflection or any deliberation, but by the single fact of its own existence, illuminates whatever is capable of receiving its light, and that in the measure appropriate to each nature, likewise the Good, who outshines a faint image, sheds, in an analogous manner, rays of complete kindness on all beings. To these rays, intelligible and intelligent essences, powers, and virtues owe their existence; due to them, they have their existence and an indestructible and unchanging life, being emancipated from all corruption, death, matter and generation, free also from instability, decay and every other change. Incorporeal and immaterial, they are intelligible as intellects,...they are superhumanly...intelligent, enlightened concerning the specific reasons for things, and they once again transmit their benefits to their kind.¹⁸⁷

All beings, spiritual and human, exist out of God’s overflowing love. Creation, too, is a manifestation of God’s outpouring goodness. God’s infinite and other directed love created a world that was destined through grace to participate in his divine life. God is “essential good,”¹⁸⁸ claims Dionysius, and “the good is one with the Being of God.”¹⁸⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa concurs with Dionysius’ teaching on the goodness of God. He observes that the perfection of God’s goodness is manifested in the creation of the human person *ex nihilo*. He writes:

God is, by his very nature, all the good it is possible to conceive; or rather, He surpasses in goodness all that it is possible for our minds to understand or grasp.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 239-240.

¹⁸⁶ Jules Gross, *The Divinisation of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers* (Anaheim: A&C Press, 2002), 235.

¹⁸⁷ Dionysius the Aeropagite, *On Divine Names* 4.1, 693B-696A; quoted in Gross, 235-236.

¹⁸⁸ Staniloae, 186.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

And his reason for creating human life is simply this—because He is good.¹⁹⁰

In their treatment of creation, the early Fathers set the tone for theological thinking in regards to the nature and destiny of the human person, created out of trinitarian love.

Staniloae observes that within trinitarian *perichoresis* the divine Persons go out of themselves in the direction of the others. This characterizes divine love as a movement from one to the other while remaining unmoved or unconfused. Due to the going out of the divine Persons, there exists the possibility for the divine Persons to go out toward created personal beings.¹⁹¹ The goodness and the interpersonal Being of God extends the interior communion of the divine Persons to personal created beings.¹⁹²

Like the Eastern Fathers, Staniloae understands the reason for creation to originate within trinitarian *perichoresis*:

But the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit have decided to pass on the existence they enjoy to other conscious beings, even though in an infinitely reduced measure. And thus creation came into existence out of nothing and reverberates in the variety of the world—and especially in the capacity for thinking and living...with which created persons are endowed, as a shadow; the infinite richness of being which is received from the Father, together with its living as gift and light enjoyed by the Son, and with the feeling of joy as it is enjoyed in communion by the Holy Spirit.¹⁹³

Staniloae's passage reveals the ineffable goodness and love of the Divine Trinity of Persons, the mystery of the plenitude of life which is, at the same time, revealed and hidden beyond human understanding.¹⁹⁴ Within the divine communion of love, Staniloae locates the foundation of creation.

¹⁹⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *De hominis opificio*, XVI, *Patrologia Graeca*, t.44, 184; quoted in Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 118-119.

¹⁹¹ Staniloae, 240, 241.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 187, 189.

¹⁹³ Dumitru Staniloae, *Chipul Nemoritor al lui Dumnezeu*, 255-256; quoted in Emil Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae* (Waynesboro: Paternoster Press, 1999), 102.

The interpersonal communion of the divine Persons freely wills to manifest itself through its energies toward the world and humanity. Creation, the very first act of God's revelation, establishes the world and humanity as a reality. It is at the same time, imbued by God with its laws of nature and freedom, while also contingent upon God for its own existence.¹⁹⁵ Staniloae insists that only out of divine love, and not by any external or internal necessity, the Triune God calls creation into existence. Divine love is the act of God's Being that creates humanity and the world out of nothing for communion with God.¹⁹⁶ The creation of the world and of personal beings is the supreme manifestation of the intertrinitarian love and goodness known to the divine Persons. Having its origins within the trinitarian *perichoresis* of love, all of creation exists within the harmony and rationality of the trinity of Persons. Thus, the mystery of divine interpersonal love will be key to understanding God's purpose for creation for, as Staniloae observes, "nothing is understood apart from the holy Trinity."¹⁹⁷ Staniloae's theology of creation clearly demonstrates that the theological vision of the Eastern Fathers, i.e., *theosis*, is rooted in divine *perichoresis*, the mutual love of the Divine Persons. God creates humanity and the world out of love to share in His divine glory.

Creation Implies *Theosis*¹⁹⁸

Eastern Christian theologian, George Florovsky writes, "There is in creation a supra-natural challenging goal set above its own nature—the challenging goal, founded

¹⁹⁴ Staniloae, 247.

¹⁹⁵ Dumitru Staniloae, *Theology and the Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1980), 113-114.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁷ Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 203.

¹⁹⁸ Bartos, 104.

on freedom, of a free participation in and union with God.”¹⁹⁹ It has been established that the essence of *theosis* is participation in divine life and subsequent union with God.

Staniloae believes that the purpose and destiny of all creation is discovered within the divine *perichoresis*:

Only because He is in himself the fullness that transcends all determination and becoming, all increase and decrease, could God have created a world destined to participate in his eternity, understood as fullness of interpersonal communion. For the creating of the world could have no other point. Moreover, a world existing by itself as an impersonal eternity, increasing and decreasing continually within a closed circle, would have no reason and would be entirely inexplicable.²⁰⁰

Clearly, Staniloae sees in the divine *perichoresis* the real act of *theosis*.²⁰¹ “God created the world out of his goodness in order to make other beings partakers, too, in his intertrinitarian love.”²⁰² He finds support in Dionysius, borrowing from his work, *On the*

Divine Names:

The Good returns all things to itself and gathers together whatever may be scattered, for it is the divine source and unifier of the sum total of things. Each being looks to it as its source, as the agent of cohesion, and as an objective. The Good, as Scripture testifies, produced everything and it is the ultimately perfect cause. In it, ‘all things hold together’ and are maintained and preserved as if in some almighty receptacle. All things are returned to it as their own goal. All things desire it.²⁰³

By design and nature, then, all of God’s creation is inclined towards Him. As the fulfillment of all creation, God gifts human persons with the freedom to choose to participate in this union.

¹⁹⁹ Georges Florovsky, *Creation and Redemption*, 73; quoted in Bartos, 150, n.38.

²⁰⁰ Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 153.

²⁰¹ Bartos, 183.

²⁰² Dumitru Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. 2, *The World: Creation and Deification* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 17.

²⁰³ Dionysius the Aeropagite, *On the Divine Names* 4.4, *Patrologia Graeca* 3, 700A-B; quoted in Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 17-18.

Thunberg makes the claim that Maximus frequently uses the term *perichoresis* in relation to *theosis*. He points to the following statements:

...the true revelation of the object of faith is the ineffable penetration (περιχωρησις) of this 'object' in accordance with the amount of faith present in the believer.²⁰⁴

It is a *perichoresis* "defined as ε'πα'υοδοζ (an ascent) of the believers to their Cause and End."²⁰⁵ In the language of Staniloae, the free and loving response of the created person to the love and kindness of God's creative act constitutes the beginning of the act of deification, or the ascent.

Thunberg locates the basis for Maximus' theology of creation in the christological teachings of Chalcedon: "the union of the two natures in Christ as without confusion, change, division and separation, but in mutual communication."²⁰⁶ The indivisible union and the "preserved identity"²⁰⁷ of the human and divine natures in Christ are characteristic of God's relationship to creation and of the relationship of created realities to one another.²⁰⁸ Maximus' teaching, therefore, suggests that it is possible for human nature and all created matter to participate in the divine life of God based on the doctrine of the two natures in the one Person of the Incarnate Word. His thinking, based on the christological paradigm, expanded the doctrine of *perichoresis* to include a soteriological dimension.

²⁰⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 59, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 608C; quoted in Thunberg, 27.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 608D.

²⁰⁶ Thunberg, 51.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

The Cosmology of St. Maximus

Staniloae discovers the source of his work on creation and *theosis* in the cosmology of St. Maximus. The following section is a summary of Maximus' theology of creation, which is intended to offer some general background to Staniloae's theory of cosmic transfiguration. Maximian cosmology includes eight basic principles. However limited in its scope, the following outlines the eight basic components of Maximus' cosmology.

1. Creation *ex nihilo*: This teaching emphasizes the distance and the difference which distinguish the Creator and creation. It is a gulf that only God can overcome. As "an expression of God's loving kindness...God places over against himself a world which is utterly distinct and which He intends to bring into union with himself without annihilating the difference."²⁰⁹ It places God as superior to all of his creation and in no way dependent on it.²¹⁰ Thunberg notes, "In God's creation, difference conditions unity and unity difference, just as they do in Christ."²¹¹ Thunberg views this aspect of unity and diversity in Maximus' theory of creation *ex nihilo* as proof of how Maximus understands the correlation between cosmology and Christology in the divine economy.²¹²

²⁰⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.1; quoted in Thunberg, 52-53.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 52.

²¹¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 10, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1133CD; quoted in Thunberg, 57.

²¹² Thunberg, 67.

2. “Creation because of God’s will”:²¹³ In this element, Maximus establishes that the sovereign God is not bound to create by any need or obligation since everything is created by Him for an established purpose.²¹⁴ “The principles of differentiated creation, pre-existent in God” comprise his theology of the *λογοι*.²¹⁵ “The *λογοι* point to a divine purpose, summarized in the *Logos*, where all partial *λογοι* are held together.”²¹⁶ Humanity is fulfilled in communion with God and is united with one another only in its common relation to him.²¹⁷
3. “Creation because of God’s benevolence:”²¹⁸ Maximus argues that creation is the manifestation of God’s goodness. After the sin of Adam and Eve, Christ’s coming realized God’s original intention for the deification of humankind and creation as well as the salvation of fallen creation.²¹⁹ God’s providence embraces creation in order to preserve it. Thunberg posits that Maximus does not intend a moral providence that seeks conversion. Divine judgment includes God’s wise and saving regard for his purpose of creation: a living relationship with him.²²⁰

²¹³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate*, 4.3, 4; quoted in Thunberg, 57.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 68.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 68.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

²¹⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.3-4; quoted in Thunberg, 69-76.

²¹⁹ Thunberg, 70.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 74.

4. “Creation by the Word:”²²¹ There are two principles at work in this component. God the Father creates together with the Word and the Spirit and constitutes the principle of unity and diversity. Secondly, there is a link between cosmology and the divine economy. The created existence of a thing is found in God’s will and is intended to participate in God as being.²²² The *λογοι* of creation “are held together by the *Logos*...in Christ the *Logos*, all has been created.”²²³ Thunberg notes that Maximus refers to Christ’s centrality in the divine economy of salvation in three ways; 1) by assuming human nature; 2) as the *λογοι* of humankind; and 3) in the Scriptures.²²⁴ Therefore, creation is included in God’s plan for deification by virtue of the grace of the Incarnate *Logos* who holds together the *λογοι* of all created things.²²⁵
5. “Creation on the basis of God’s prudence:”²²⁶ An apophatic air surrounds this element of Maximus’ cosmology and invites the believer to surrender to God’s unsearchable prudence in bringing the world into existence.²²⁷ Of this unfathomable mystery, Gregory of Nyssa writes:

Yet we do believe that all things are of God as we hear the Scripture say so; and as to the question how they were in God, a question beyond our reason, we do not seek to pry into it, believing that all things are within the capacity of God’s power, both to give existence to what is not, and to implant qualities at his pleasure in what is.²²⁸

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 76.

²²² Thunberg, 76-78.

²²³ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1077C; quoted in Thunberg, 80.

²²⁴ Thunberg, 82.

²²⁵ Thunberg, 82,84.

²²⁶ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.1; quoted in Thunberg, 84-85.

²²⁷ Thunberg, 84-85.

²²⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XXIII, 4 *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Church*, vol.V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 414.

Like Gregory of Nyssa, who seeks to preserve the utter transcendence of God, Maximus maintains the incognoscibility of God and the need to surrender in faith to His limitless Wisdom.

6. “Creation as an act of divine condescension.”²²⁹ Maximus highlights the “abyss”²³⁰ of God’s goodness which manifests itself in creative acts. God is the source of all existence, who fixes in His rational beings a movement and orientation towards Him, their Creator and Provider.²³¹
7. “Every creature is a composite of substance and accident.”²³² This teaching implies that God is a “pure substance, simple and unqualified,”²³³ and created beings “have qualified substances, and are composite and mutable.”²³⁴ Maximus describes substance in the following manner: “οὐσία is a category of created being for which the principle of being...is the unifying norm, and which includes all families of creation.”²³⁵ “Nature,” Maximus notes, refers to the “principle of being,”²³⁶ common to many, that includes a dynamic element created by God and manifests the identity of a species.²³⁷ “The ultimate end of the whole creation must be that for which all things are, and which itself is caused by nothing, that which is its own end, i.e., God.”²³⁸

²²⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.9, 2.6; quoted in Thunberg, 85-88.

²³⁰ Thunberg, 86.

²³¹ Thunberg, 86.

²³² St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.9; quoted in Thunberg, 88.

²³³ Thunberg, 88.

²³⁴ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.9; quoted in Thunberg, 88.

²³⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 48, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 440D; quoted in Thunberg, 89.

²³⁶ Thunberg, 92.

²³⁷ Thunberg, 92-94.

Maximus states that only God is ἀυτοτελες (Absolute) and created things cannot be an end in themselves.

8. “Creation...of qualified substances...in need of divine Providence:”²³⁹ This teaching refers to the dependency of substances and qualities on God’s condescending divine grace for their subsistence. There is an ontological distinction between what is divine and what is created, yet there is a dynamic transcendence in Maximus’ cosmology that effects all the distinctions in creation. He posits a providential purpose that provides a unifying τέλος(end) for the whole of creation while preserving the natural fixity of substances, natures and species.²⁴⁰

Maximus’ theology affirms that God’s design for creation intends that all of creation return to Him, Who is the Cause and End of all existence. Based on the assertion that all of creation is summarized in the *Logos*, Maximus teaches that all things abide in Christ who is central to the economy of salvation, the One in whom the distance between divinity and humanity is overcome. God’s plan for creation will be accomplished through a movement towards its *telos*, held together by the *Logos* and strengthened by God’s providence and condescending grace. Thus, creation will realize a transcendence that is outside of nature itself; one that accomplishes a union without confusion, a *theosis* which has its first movement in creation. According to St. Maximus:

Car c’est aussi pour cela qu’il a nous a faits: pour que nous devenions communiants à la nature divine (2Pt 1:4) et participants de son éternité, et que nous paraissions semblables à Lui selon la divinization qui vient

²³⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua* 7, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1072BC; quoted in Thunberg, 95.

²³⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *4 Centuriae de charitate* 4.6; quoted in Thunberg, 95.

²⁴⁰ Thunberg, 96-98.

de la grâce, par laquelle sont toute la constitution et la permanence des êtres, et la production et la genèse des choses qui ne sont pas.²⁴¹

(This is why He made us: so that we would become partakers of divine life

(2Pt 1:4) and that we would become like Him according to the deification that comes by grace, by which human beings are sustained and by which things that are not come to be.)

Thus, Maximus' theology of creation substantiates that *theosis* originates in the mutually shared being of the Trinity of Persons, whose love manifests itself in creation. Out of His inexhaustible love and goodness, God created out of nothing for the purpose of sharing His divine trinitarian love with all of created existence.

Staniloae and Cosmic Transfiguration

When Staniloae speaks of the "God of boundless riches,"²⁴² he embraces both the "super-essence"²⁴³ of God himself and creation (cosmic nature and humanity) as a reflection of and participant of that goodness.²⁴⁴ God's plan for creation has always willed its deification. However, as a result of sin, *theosis* also implied salvation. Staniloae's theology of the world insists that God's plan for deification and salvation embrace a humanity that is "ontologically united with nature."²⁴⁵ Neither can fulfill its purpose without the other. As part of the source of human nature and as its condition for existence, nature, like humanity, is destined for participation in the glory of the Kingdom of heaven. After all, notes Staniloae, the glory of the transfigured Christ on Mount Tabor spread over nature, too. Out of his goodness, God gave nature as a gift to humanity who

²⁴¹ Maxime le Confesseur, *La Divinisation de l'Homme Selon Saint Maxime le Confesseur*, ed. Jean-Claude Larchet (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1996), 84.

²⁴² Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 113.

²⁴³ Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 141.

²⁴⁴ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 113.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

in turn, became responsible for its transformation, deification and salvation.²⁴⁶ In this fashion, submits Staniloae, all creation will be deified.

According to Bartos, Staniloae argues that God establishes a relationship of love and communication with humankind in giving the world as a gift to them. When received as a gift, the world becomes the means by which humankind begins the movement toward its vocation to *theosis* and the deification of all creation. Offered back to God as a return gift of love, the world becomes the means of dialogue and communion with God. Staniloae suggests a sacramental character inherent in all of God's creation. He writes:

The whole world ought to be regarded as the visible part of the universal and continuing sacrament, and all [humanity's] activity as a sacramental, divine communion. The conception of the world as the gift of God or as the vehicle of His love, and as the visible part of a sacrament of God's grace, are one and the same.²⁴⁷

Humanity receives the world as gift and in turn, is given the task of transforming it.²⁴⁸

When Maximus refers to the abyss between the Creator and creation, he grounds this teaching in creation *ex nihilo*. Staniloae understands this truth to be a sign of God's freedom, His love and purpose for creation: destined for an eternal existence with Him.²⁴⁹ If there were no beginning, creation would not be *ex nihilo*. Therefore, the created world and humankind would not be:

[the] exclusive work of God's freedom and love, and they would not be destined for an existence in the plenitude of God, but rather reality's relative, imperfect form would be its sole, fatal essence. Only if it came to exist out of nothing, by the will of God, can the world be elevated to the level of perfection in God by His omnipotent will and by His love...²⁵⁰

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 2-4.

²⁴⁷ Dumitru Staniloae, "The World as Gift and Sacrament of God's Love," *Sobornost* 9 (1969), 666-667; quoted in Bartos, 117.

²⁴⁸ Bartos, 117.

²⁴⁹ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 7.

²⁵⁰ Dumitru Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatica Ortodoxa*, vol.1, 328; quoted in Bartos, 101.

Creation *ex nihilo* establishes the distinction between God and his creation and affirms that creation is not dependent upon itself for its existence. It suggests that God had no external reasons for this act except that it was a manifestation of the infinite plenitude and love of the divine Persons of the Trinity. Only because God is infinite fullness could He create “a world destined to participate in his eternity, understood as fullness of interpersonal communion.”²⁵¹ Creation *ex nihilo*, therefore is strong evidence for God’s boundless love and eternal purpose in freely creating all existence.

Staniloae argues that the “super-essence”²⁵² of God enters into relationship with the finite essence of creation and manifests itself to humanity in “dynamic attributes.”²⁵³ The finitude of creation is only understood in relationship to God’s essence.²⁵⁴ By means of God’s grace, the created world moves in a passage of ascent toward God’s attributes.²⁵⁵ Staniloae identifies nine divine attributes that disclose the rapport between God and creation. Two of these attributes, i.e., infinity and omnipotence, have a direct bearing on humanity’s vocation to deification.

Created essence in its finitude is conditioned by the infinity of God.²⁵⁶ Infinity is the attribute that is shown through God’s action towards the world. Permeated by divine infinity, the world can only exist in relationship to that infinity. By grace, creation is called to participate and grow in divine infinity. Only the communion of divine Persons can offer the possibility of sharing its inexhaustible richness. Only the freedom of the

²⁵¹ Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 153.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

triune God renders creation eligible to participate in divine infinity without the loss of its boundaries. Maximus posits that God is even above the attributes in which creation participates, a teaching that confirms Staniloae's thesis that "to eternity God will never cease to deify the world."²⁵⁷ The infinity of God is fullness with no boundaries that humanity, as far as is possible, can experience in fullness.²⁵⁸

When all meanings of things that have been thought, whether sensible or intelligible, pass away, then at the same time with all these meanings all understanding and relation with sensible and intelligible things will cease... Then the soul will be united with God beyond mind and reason and knowledge, in an incomprehensible, unknown, and unutterable manner, through a simple contact, no longer understanding and no longer reasoning about God... Then it will be free from any kind of change... For any circling movement of existing things will come to an end in the infinity around God in whom all things that move receive their stability. For infinity is around God, but it is not God, for He is incomparably above even this.²⁵⁹

All creation, in its finitude, is drawn by the infinity of God into an eternal communion whereby all will be deified.

The omnipotent God, the source of all power, chooses to act freely outside of Himself "in conformity with his being as eternal communion."²⁶⁰ In creating human persons to share in interpersonal eternal communion with Him, therefore, He endows them with the desire for Him and provides them with the means necessary to achieve this end.²⁶¹ From within God's omnipotence, created persons are given the opportunity to be raised up to communion with God according to their capacity to receive this power. Staniloae calls this "the *kenosis* or the condescension of God."²⁶² Even this descent is a

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 143.

²⁵⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Ambigua*, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1220B-C; quoted in Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 143.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 187.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 189.

mark of God's freedom and omnipotence. It has as its purpose the movement of the created world to its fulfillment in full communion with God.²⁶³ "[Humanity] strains toward an infinite personal reality higher than [itself], a reality from which [it] can nourish [itself] infinitely..."²⁶⁴ Staniloae posits that humanity's true meaning is realized in communion with God, "the supreme personal Reality."²⁶⁵ In Eastern Christian thinking, God's omnipotence is a movement outwards for the good of the world that empowers human persons to move towards Him. According to Staniloae creation's deification is located in the omnipotence of God.²⁶⁶

As Staniloae indicates, Eastern Christianity promotes God's love for the world and his continuing action to bring the world in full communion with himself. God is the sustaining, protecting and infinitely good God. Staniloae argues that the Christian West places more emphasis on divine omnipotence as the respectful disposition of the world.²⁶⁷ The Christian East regards divine omnipotence as paternal, like the love the Father has for the Son. This filial love is the basis for the salvation of the world. God's intertrinitarian love offers adoption to humanity out of "condescending love."²⁶⁸ The Son of God becomes human in order to raise humanity into the fullness of trinitarian love. United to Christ, humanity receives the power through the Spirit to spiritualize nature and draw it, too, into the fullness of deification and salvation.²⁶⁹

In Christ, the Son of God becomes bearer of the perfect trinitarian love for [humankind] and also of human love raised up to the capacity of responding

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 189, 191.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 191.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 192.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 194-195.

perfectly to that love. In the state of resurrection, moreover, the Son extends unobstructedly this perfect divine-human dialogue of love which has been realized in himself, by drawing us also into it. In Christ, [humanity] has received the power to love God within a unique love together with the only begotten Son of God, and to love [humanity] with the very love of God. In Christ's resurrected state, this power is communicated to us, too, and we are to appropriate it fully in our own resurrected state... Through the resurrection the power of God shows itself as something infinitely greater, infinitely more full of meaning. God will fill this world with his uncreated glory when He clothes it in immortality and makes of it the transcendent *milieu* of his own endless depth of life and meanings.²⁷⁰

Staniloae concludes that Christ's Incarnation draws human nature to himself, enabling humanity to share in divine life by participation. Human nature is thus capable of realizing its fulfillment in the resurrection whereby Christ raises it up in glory and eternal union with God. Thus, Christ is revealed as the full meaning of all things. Resurrection in Christ is the purpose of creation and revelation as it draws all of creation into full communion with God, into deification.²⁷¹

Through the incarnation and resurrection, and through the descent of the Holy Spirit, the *Logos*—as the meaning of all created things—has become their interior meaning and goal, a meaning and goal that not only reveal what created things are going to be, but also lead them through the Spirit to what they ought to be, at the same time revealing in himself the fulfilled meaning of creation and revelation.²⁷²

In Christ, the Father gives the fullness of his love to all of creation. Staniloae like Maximus, affirms the intimate connection between the *λογος* of creation, the Incarnate *Logos* of God, and God's plan for the deification and salvation of the world.²⁷³ The divine Son of God assumes human nature, deifies it, and "becomes the central agent of

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 195.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 25-29.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁷³ Thunberg, 81.

theosis”²⁷⁴ for the entire created world. Humanity’s communion with God is actualized in the hypostasis of Christ which connects human nature with the divine.²⁷⁵

Theosis: The Theological Vision of Eastern Christianity

Theosis has been woven into the pattern of Eastern Christianity from the time of the early Fathers. It comes as a result of the “hermeneutical proximity of the Fathers to Scripture.”²⁷⁶ What gives credence to their teachings proceeds from an exegesis that took place within the context of the worshipping community of the early Church. “Formed by prayer, worship, meditation, self-examination, confession”²⁷⁷ and the sacraments, the Fathers refused to interpret the Scriptures as an intellectual pursuit divorced from the life of grace experienced in the Church.²⁷⁸ According to Lossky, the Fathers assert the illuminating and deifying role of the Holy Spirit in the Church Who reveals to humankind the truths contained in the Scriptures and all dogma.²⁷⁹ The Holy Spirit is the unceasing witness in the Church to the mysteries of the faith that lead to the knowledge of God and communion with the divine Trinity. As Lossky indicates, this belief forms the basis of Eastern Christianity which claims that the lived liturgical experience of the Church and her teachings cannot be understood in isolation from each other.²⁸⁰ In this way, the Christian is formed and nurtured in [his/her] journey towards the final goal of union with God through grace.²⁸¹ Eastern Christian theology has never lost sight of its fundamental

²⁷⁴ Bartos, 174.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Christopher A. Hall, *Reading Scripture With the Church Fathers* (Downer’s Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 41.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁷⁹ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 239.

²⁸⁰ Lossky, 236.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 237-238.

vocation and ultimate goal of Θε'ωσις (*theosis*) to “become god by grace, or ‘a partaker of the divine nature.’” (2Pet 1:4)²⁸²

...His divine power has bestowed on us everything that makes for life and devotion, through the knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and power. Through these, He has bestowed on us the precious and very promises, so that through them you may come to share in the divine nature. (2 Peter 1:3-4)

Inspired by this passage from St. Peter, the Eastern Fathers formulated the doctrine of *theosis* that would become the theological vision of the early Church and the Eastern Christian tradition.

The doctrine of *theosis* “...is the central theme, chief aim, basic purpose,...and the primary religious ideal of [Eastern Christianity].”²⁸³ St. Gregory Nazianzen writes that *theosis* is “the blessed *telos* for which all things were made.”²⁸⁴ St. Irenaeus was the first to formulate the expression, “God made himself [human] that [humanity] might become god.”²⁸⁵ St. Basil adds, “the goal of our calling is to become like God...It is the Holy Spirit being God by nature...who deifies by grace those who still belong to a nature subject to change.”²⁸⁶ *Theosis* was central to the theology of St. Athanasius. According to Meyendorff, *theosis* “was the very argument with which Athanasius had countered Arius.”²⁸⁷ St. John of Damascus writes, “People are created for deification...the work of Christ ensures that we might have his image restored in us and so become ‘partakers of

²⁸² Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 98.

²⁸³ Daniel B. Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 120.

²⁸⁴ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *To Thallasios* 60; quoted in Clendenin, 121.

²⁸⁵ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 97.

²⁸⁶ St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 1.2; quoted in Clendenin, 128.

²⁸⁷ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1979), 33.

divinity.”²⁸⁸ The Eastern Fathers laid the foundation for theological thinking within the doctrine of *theosis*.

Centuries later, Eastern Christian theologians continue to assert the significance of the doctrine of *theosis* as “the very essence of Christianity.”²⁸⁹ Citing the teaching of Evagrius Ponticus, Lossky posits that union with the triune God is the basis and the goal of all theology:

...To know the mystery of the Trinity in its fullness is to enter into perfect union with God and to attain to the deification of the human creature: in other words, to enter into the divine life, the very life of the Trinity, and to become, in St. Peter’s words, ‘partakers of the divine nature.’²⁹⁰

Ware notes the influence of Psalm 82:6, “I say you are gods,” to the “spiritual imagination of Orthodoxy:”

In the Orthodox understanding, Christianity signifies not merely an adherence to certain dogmas, not merely an exterior imitation of Christ through moral effort, but direct union with the living God, the total transformation of the human person by divine grace and glory, what the Greek Fathers termed ‘deification’ or ‘divinization’ (*theosis*...).²⁹¹

Panayiotis Nellas observes that the source of the inspiration of the Fathers, which he refers to as “an inclination towards God,”²⁹² is a result of humanity’s deification. This thinking corresponds to Staniloae’s description of the omnipotence of God that articulates humanity’s capacity to move towards God. Nellas adds that the true greatness of the human person is the call to become a god. He writes, “I call a human being someone who has journeyed far from [humankind] and has advanced toward God Himself.”²⁹³

²⁸⁸ St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4.4; quoted in Clendenin, 128-129.

²⁸⁹ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 97.

²⁹⁰ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 67.

²⁹¹ Mantzaridis, 7.

²⁹² Nellas, 15.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

Their writings are a just a sampling of the vital role *theosis* has played in the evolution of Eastern Christian thought.

Theosis language is imbedded in the liturgy and prayer life of the Eastern Christian Church.²⁹⁴ This fact demonstrates the primordial role of the doctrine in the tradition of the Christian East. The Church lives and teaches its fundamental truths to its people through the liturgy and prayer. Eastern Christians are repeatedly reminded of their vocation to *theosis* with each liturgical celebration. *Theosis* language can be found in the hymns, in the canons, in the liturgy of time, and other liturgical prayers. The fourth century Christian poet, Ephrem the Syrian, wrote hymns which defended the doctrine against charges of philosophical Hellenism. The following excerpts from three of his works are examples of his use of *theosis* themes:²⁹⁵

The Most High knew that Adam wanted to become a god,
so He sent His Son, who put him on
in order to grant him his desire.²⁹⁶

References to the Incarnation are apparent in the hymn *On Virginity*:

Divinity flew down and descended
to raise and draw up humanity.
The Son has made beautiful the servant's deformity,
and he has become a god, just as he desired.²⁹⁷

Echoes of Irenaeus' maxim are heard within this hymn:

He gave us divinity,
we gave Him humanity.²⁹⁸

²⁹⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One With God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2004), 19.

²⁹⁵ Clendenin, 129.

²⁹⁶ Ephrem the Syrian, "Commentary on Genesis;" quoted in Clendenin, 129.

²⁹⁷ Ephrem the Syrian, "On Virginity;" quoted in Clendenin, 129.

²⁹⁸ Ephrem the Syrian, in *Hymns on Paradise*, trans. Sebastian Brock (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 72-74: quoted in Clendenin, 129.

The canon for Matins on Holy Thursday also contains *theosis* language. “In my Kingdom, said Christ, I shall be God with you as god.”²⁹⁹ In the ancient liturgy of St. James, a prayer of praise for the gift of *theosis* is found:

Thou has united, O Lord, Thy Divinity with our humanity
and our humanity with Thy divinity.
Thy life with our mortality and our mortality with Thy life;
Thou hast received what was ours and has given unto us what was Thine,
for the life and salvation of our souls,
praise be to Thee in eternity.³⁰⁰

The Doxastikon at the Praises, used on the feast of the Annunciation, is a prayerful reminder of how God’s love restores the possibility of deification for humanity:

Adam of old was deceived:
wanting to be God he failed to be God.
God becomes [human],
so that He may make Adam god.³⁰¹

The liturgical experience of the Church instructs Christian believers and orients them toward their vocation of *theosis*, to share in divine life and communion with God.

Lossky posits that the Eastern Fathers understood theology as the mystery of the revelation of the Triune God.³⁰² Evagrius Ponticus believed that knowledge of the trinitarian mystery would lead to communion with God, participation in trinitarian life, and the attainment of *theosis*.³⁰³ These teachings were based on the vision that humanity is called to know the Triune God and to participate in his divine life. As Meyendorff

²⁹⁹ Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (London: Penguin, 1964), 236; quoted in Kärkkäinen, 19-20.

³⁰⁰ N. Arseniev, *Mysticism and the Eastern Church* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 148; quote in Kärkkäinen, 20.

³⁰¹ Mantzaridis, 13.

³⁰² Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 67.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

notes, this vocation is a “particular privilege”³⁰⁴ for the human person and indicates the unique relationship with God that is possible through His grace. It is a gift challenging Christians to live and to grow in God’s life and the attainment of virtues. Thus, Christians begin to realize their nature and determine the ultimate destiny of the world.³⁰⁵ In the Christian East, the doctrine of *theosis* defined the vision and destiny of the human person: to grow in the knowledge and love of the Triune God and to share in His life in perfect communion.

Theosis and Human Destiny

For millennia, the human spirit has longed to discover the meaning of its existence and, at the same time, has pondered its ultimate destiny. The psalmist reveals the answer to the universal longing of humankind:

What are humans that you are mindful of them, mere mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them little less than a god, crowned them with glory and honor.
You have given them rule over the works of your hands, put all things at their feet.
(Ps 8: 5-7)

Eastern Christians place the question of human nature and human destiny at the forefront of their theological vision.³⁰⁶ United in their conviction, they claim: “Now the purpose of our life is blessedness...not only to behold the Trinity, supreme in Kingship, but also to receive an influx of the divine and as it were to suffer deification.”³⁰⁷ Mantzaridis, like the early Fathers, argues that *theosis* “...is that which from the beginning has constituted

³⁰⁴ Meyendorff, 138.

³⁰⁵ Meyendorff, 139.

³⁰⁶ Clendenin, 119.

³⁰⁷ Theoretikon, in *Philokalia*, trans. and ed. G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard, and Kallistos Ware, 3 vols (London: Faber and Faber, 1979-1990) 2:43; quoted in Clendenin, 119.

the innermost longing of [human] existence.”³⁰⁸ Christoforos Stavropoulos agrees that deification is the purpose of human existence and the ultimate destiny of humanity.³⁰⁹

He continues:

This is the purpose of your life; that you be a participant, a sharer in the nature of God and in the life of Christ, a communicant of divine grace and energy—to become just like God, a true god.³¹⁰

Humanity’s search for meaning and purpose finds satisfaction in the Eastern Christian vision of *theosis*.

According to Meyendorff, humanity’s true nature as person is realized in relationship to God. He adds that the relationship is characterized by the transcendence of the human person to growth in divine likeness that results in communion with God.³¹¹ The Eastern Fathers held fast to the vision that life in God determined the nature of the human person. In fact, they believed that rejection of the call to share in divine life caused enslavement to death, and precluded the possibility of authentic and fully human existence.³¹²

But by rejecting God, human freedom, in fact, destroys itself. Outside of God, [humanity] ceases to be authentically and fully human. [It] is enslaved to the devil through death. This idea...serves as the basis of the...understanding of the destiny of [humanity]: participation in God, or ‘deification’ (*theosis*), as the goal of human existence.³¹³

Guided by the principle that there is no meaning or purpose of life outside of God, Eastern Christians confess that the true nature of the human person longs for

³⁰⁸ Mantzaridis, 12.

³⁰⁹ Christoforos Stavropoulos, *Partakers of Divine Nature* (Minneapolis: Light and Life Publishing Co., 1976), 11.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 18.

³¹¹ Meyendorff, 2.

³¹² *Ibid.*, 163.

³¹³ *Ibid.*

participation in divine life which is realized in the vocation to *theosis*.

As God's special act of creation, the human person comes into existence as a unity of soul and body.³¹⁴ According to Staniloae, this factor is significant in understanding God's divine purpose for humanity's participation in trinitarian life. He argues that the experience of the human person in relationship is a reflection of the reciprocity and sharing that occurs within trinitarian *perichoresis*. Staniloae identifies three areas of human experience that justify his position: the inner relation of soul and body; the relationship of person to person; and the relationship of humankind with the world.³¹⁵ Staniloae's "personalist"³¹⁶ position is a testimony that God's eternal plan and design for humankind is to share in His trinitarian life, to attain *theosis*.³¹⁷ It is a design of the first moment of human creation when God said, "Let us make [humankind] in our image, after our likeness." (Gen.1:26) Humankind's creation as a unity of body and soul illuminates the understanding of God's plan to deify all creation.

The creation account in Genesis recounts how God breathes the breath of life into the human person. (Gen 2:7) Such a creative act distinguishes humanity from the rest of creation, and asserts the unique kinship human beings possess with God, their Creator.³¹⁸ St. Gregory of Palamas associates this inbreathing with eternal life:

What did he breathe into him? The breath of life...'The first [human]...became a living spirit.' But what does 'living' mean? Eternally living, immortal, which is the same as saying rational...it is also endowed with divine grace. For such is

³¹⁴ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 80.

³¹⁵ Bartos, 96.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

³¹⁸ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 82.

the truly living soul...³¹⁹

The soul, notes Staniloae, renders the human person worthy of the dignity of being created in God's image. This privilege is manifested by human consciousness and human freedom.³²⁰ Created in the image of God, who is personal, the human person is capable of a personal relationship with Him, thus fulfilling the purpose of [his/her] creation to dialogue and to enter into relationship with God.³²¹

Staniloae argues that the unity of body and soul in the human person is evidence that [he/she] is not simply the product of the earth, but is intrinsically connected to it.³²²

He states:

[Humankind] is created not only from dust but also through God's act of breathing into the body fashioned by dust, it is evident that [the human person] has a special position not only *vis-à-vis* nature, from which [his/her] body is taken, but also in relation to God.³²³

In Staniloae's view, God created the world for the human person as an "incarnate spirit"³²⁴ so that it might be the medium through which [he/she] enters into a relationship of dialogue with God. The relationship of humankind to nature is indicative of the role given them by God to mediate the transformation and deification of creation.³²⁵ Through the divine creative act of the breath of God, the human person is distinguished from all of creation and becomes inherently capable of participating in the life of God, for which [he/she] longs, while remaining organically connected to nature.

³¹⁹ St. Gregory of Palamas, *The Procession of the Holy Spirit* 2.8, ed. Bobribskoy in *Grigoriou tou Palama, Syggrammata*, ed. P.K. Christou, Thessaloniki 1962, vol.1, 85.5-11; quoted in Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 83.

³²⁰ Staniloae, 65.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

³²² *Ibid.*, 80.

³²³ *Ibid.*, 81.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*, 78.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.

According to Lossky, humanity's dignity and greatness rests in the inherent capacity to participate in divine life.³²⁶ He observes that St. Gregory of Nyssa locates the greatness of the human person in [his/her] ability to share in divine plenitude:

The true greatness of [the human person] is not in his[her] incontestable kinship with the universe, but in his[her] participation in divine plenitude, in the mystery within himself[herself] of the 'image' and 'likeness.'³²⁷

Or, as Staniloae observes, Gregory links the human capacity to participate in divine plenitude with the unique kinship [he/she] enjoys with God. "There is something which relates [humankind] to God. For in order to enjoy the divine goods, [humanity] must possess something in [its] being akin to the One in whom [he/she] participates."³²⁸ St. Gregory Nazianzen writes that "God will be known, as far as is humanly possible, when the divine part in us has mingled with its like, and the image has ascended to its Archetype, for which it now has a yearning."³²⁹ Gregory concludes that *theosis* is the fulfillment of the yearning and longing implanted in the soul by God from its origins.³³⁰

Staniloae believes that this "ontological longing"³³¹ is proof of the divine plan for humanity's vocation to *theosis*. He argues, "[Humankind] strains towards an infinite personal reality higher than [they], a reality from which [they] can nourish [themselves] infinitely..."³³² Only in the infinite love of the divine Persons will humanity ever find its fulfillment and its rest. Staniloae concurs with St. Augustine, "*Inquietum est cor nostrum*

³²⁶ Vladimir Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2001), 70.

³²⁷ *Ibid.*

³²⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Great Catechetical Oratio 5, Patrologica Graeca* 45.21D; quoted in Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 85.

³²⁹ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oratio* 2.17; quoted in Bartos, 42.

³³⁰ Bartos, 42.

³³¹ Bartos, 46.

³³² Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 8.

donec requiescat in Te.”³³³ (Our hearts are restless until they rest in You) Augustine

relates the longing of the human soul to humanity’s creation in God’s image:

You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised (Ps 47:2): great is your power and your wisdom is immeasurable. (Ps 146:5) [Humanity], a little piece of your creation, desires to praise You, a human being ‘bearing his[her] mortality with him[her].’ (2 Cor 4:10), carrying with him[her] the witness of his[her] sin and the witness that you ‘resist the proud.’ (1 Pet 5:5) Nevertheless, to praise you is the desire of [humankind], a little piece of your creation. You stir [humankind] to take pleasure in praising You because You made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rests in You.³³⁴

The ultimate meaning of existence and the destiny of the human person are realized and fulfilled in participation in divine life in an eternal union of love with God. Therefore, as Staniloae concludes, the ultimate destiny of humanity is *theosis*.

The Deifying Role of the Holy Spirit

In the economy of salvation, God guides humanity towards union with Him. In fact, the doctrine of *theosis* upholds the belief that the deification of the human person is the result of God’s grace. The Eastern Christian tradition stresses that the Holy Spirit grants humanity a share in divine plenitude. As Lossky notes, “Created being, considered in itself, will always be an implenitude: considered in the Holy Spirit, it will appear as the fullness of the deified creature.”³³⁵ The Holy Spirit is the One who divinizes, making all persons sharers in the divine Trinitarian life and adopted children of God.³³⁶ According to Lossky:

But the very Person of the Holy Spirit who reveals these truths to us and who renders them inwardly luminous, manifest, almost tangible to us, nevertheless remains

³³³ St. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1.; quoted in Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 86.

³³⁴ St. Augustine, *Confessions* 1.1.1, trans. Henry Chadwick (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 3.

³³⁵ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 241.

³³⁶ Stavropoulos, 31.

Himself undisclosed and hidden, concealed by the deity which He reveals to us, by the gift which He imparts.³³⁷

In the Church, the Holy Spirit imparts the gift of divine plenitude on those who are baptized into Christ's Body.³³⁸ He is the source of their sanctification, transformation, and deification in Christ. Lossky submits that the Holy Spirit reveals the divinity of the Incarnate Son of God:

It is in the Holy Spirit that we participate in the beauty (καλλοξ) of the divine nature, it is in Him that the divinity of the Word appears to us, so that by contemplating the Incarnate Son, we no longer know him according to the flesh, but in the glory proper to his divinity.³³⁹

St. Basil observes the arcane character of the Holy Spirit in His primordial role in the *theosis* of humanity. In his treatise on the Holy Spirit, he writes:

Like the sun when it encounters a clear eye [the Holy Spirit] will show you in Himself the image of the Invisible One. In the beatifying contemplation of this image, you will see the unutterable beauty of the Archetype. Through Him is the ascension of hearts, the directing of the weak, the completion of the progressing ones. It is He, who by shining in those who have been purified from every blemish, renders them spiritual by communion with Him. And just as bright and translucent bodies, when a ray touches them, become shining in their turn and emit another brightness, in the same way the souls which bear the Spirit, illuminated by the Spirit, not only become spiritual themselves, but also pour forth grace upon others. From that comes the foreknowledge of future things, the understanding of mysteries, the discovery of that which is hidden, the distribution of gifts, the heavenly life, choruses with the angels, joy without end, perseverance in God, likeness with God, and finally, the height of desirable things, deification. (θεο'υ γευε'σΘαι)³⁴⁰

Basil's text demonstrates that the deifying role of the Holy Spirit is often associated with the metaphor of light. It is a theme used frequently by the Eastern Fathers and one that is inscribed in liturgical texts of the Eastern rite. One Antiphon reads, "The Holy Spirit

³³⁷ Lossky, 162.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Vladimir Lossky, *The Vision of God* (Bedfordshire: The Faith Press, 1963), 114.

³⁴⁰ St. Basil, *On the Holy Spirit* 9.22-23 (32:108C-109C; quoted in Gross, 192).

gives life to souls; He exalts them in purity; He causes the sole nature of the Trinity to shine in them mysteriously.”³⁴¹ An Eastern Pentecostal hymn sings of the illuminating Spirit as coequal with the Father and the Son:

The Holy Spirit forever was, and is, and shall be;
 He has neither beginning nor ending.
 but He is always joined and numbered with the Father and the Son:
 Life and giver of Life,
 Light and Bestower of Light,
 Love itself and Source of Love:
 through him the Father is made known,
 through him the Son is glorified and revealed to all,
 one is the power, one is the structure,
 one is the worship of the Holy Trinity.³⁴²

Through the activity and the mission of the Holy Spirit, God’s eternal plan for the salvation and deification of all creation is initiated and nurtured in the Church.

Theosis and the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit

The Eastern Christian doctrine of the Holy Spirit includes four principles that address the Spirit’s role in the deification of humanity. Staniloae argues that their effects are apparent in Eastern ecclesiology. He also notes their absence in Western Christian ecclesiology, which, he believes is due to the question of the *filioque*.³⁴³ According to Staniloae, the following elements distinguish Eastern Christian pneumatology:

- a) “The irreducibility of the Spirit to the Son and the affirmation of his equal importance with the *Logos*”
- b) “The inseparability of Son or *Logos* from the Spirit, in fact, their indissoluble connection”
- c) “The preservation of the filial relation of the Son towards the Father together with the affirmation of the Spirit of the Son: this makes of the presence of the

³⁴¹ Antiphon in the 4th tone from the Sunday Office; quoted in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 162.

³⁴² Kallistos Ware, “The Pentecostarion,” 412 *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Orthodox Theological Seminary, 1979), 122.

³⁴³ Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 106-107.

Son a source from which filial response, life and divine movement radiate upon [humanity]”

- d) “The understanding of the Spirit as a unifying factor, a bridge, a communicative movement between “I’s” which nevertheless does not do away with their liberty”³⁴⁴

The Holy Spirit is to be confessed as Person, one of the three eternal Persons of the Trinity. He is coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Son. He is not to be regarded merely as a function or an intermediary that the Father and the Son employ. The divine Person of the Holy Spirit has a deifying role in the economic Trinity no less than the role of the Incarnate *Logos*. Staniloae notes that Eastern Christian ecclesiology is permeated with the four principles of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit.³⁴⁵

Staniloae observes that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father to abide in the Son.³⁴⁶ This dwelling effects an eternal relation that also distinguishes them from each other. Staniloae finds support for this teaching in the words of St. Gregory Palamas:

Therefore we must ask ourselves: when the Spirit goes forth from the Father in a movement we neither see nor understand, can we say that, according to the evidence of Scripture, he has someone in whom he comes to rest in a manner which befits God? ...And that no one may think that these things were spoken and accomplished by the Father with reference to the incarnation of the Son, let us listen to the divine Damascene who writes in the eighth of the Dogmatic Chapters, ‘We believe also in the Holy Spirit who proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son.’³⁴⁷

The Son and the Spirit are indissolubly connected and their operations *ad extra* cannot be considered separately. The special relationship they share is eternal and indicates the special role each possesses in the economy of salvation.³⁴⁸

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 107.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

³⁴⁷ St. Gregory Palamas, *Twenty-Two Lectures on the Procession of the Holy Spirit*, 80-81; quoted in Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 100.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

Divine adoption takes place through the workings of the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is a trinitarian gift to humanity that enables deification. The eternal plan of the Father, that all created existence share in trinitarian life and love, is fulfilled in this great outpouring of love “lavished on...the children of God.” (1Jn 3:1) In the Spirit, the *Logos* is united to human nature, thus uniting the Incarnate *Logos* to all humanity and the created world.³⁴⁹ This movement of trinitarian love is the divine adoption of all creation setting in motion the journey to deification. St. Athanasius notes the trinitarian nature of the gift of *theosis*:

What the Spirit distributes to each comes from the Father through the Son. This is why what is given through the Son in the Spirit is a grace of the Father. We are divinized by the intimate union with the Holy Spirit which unites us with the Son of God, through this one, with the Father.³⁵⁰

Athanasius concludes that the Spirit, Who draws humanity into union with the Son and the Father, is of the same nature as that of God.³⁵¹ He also posits that creation, as well as humanity, comes to share in His divinizing role.³⁵² He writes:

It is thus in the Spirit that the *Logos* glorifies creation and, by deifying and adopting it, it leads it to the Father. But the one who unites creation with the *Logos* could not be part of the created, neither could the one who confers on creation the filial quality be foreign to the Son. If this were the case, it would be necessary to find another Spirit, in order that, in it, the first might be united with the *Logos*. This is absurd. The Spirit is not, consequently, part of the created things, but He is characteristic of the divinity of the Father, and in Him the *Logos* deifies the creatures.³⁵³

The Holy Spirit, “the Spirit of Truth,” (Jn 14:17) illuminates the revelation of the filial relationship of the Incarnate *Logos* to the Father. In Him the faithful who confess the

³⁴⁹ Gross, 170-171.

³⁵⁰ St. Athanasius, *Epistola Serapion* 1.30 (26: 600b); quoted in Gross, 171.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 1.24 (26:585c-588a); quoted in Gross, 170.

³⁵² Gross, 171.

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 1.25 (26:589b); quoted in Gross, 171.

divinity of Christ participate in the love of the Father for the Son, and the Son for the Father.

The Church and the “Spirit” of Pentecost

Jesus’ promise of the Holy Spirit upon his disciples reveals the role of the Holy Spirit in the salvation of the world.

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Advocate to be with you always, the Spirit of Truth, which the world cannot accept, because it neither sees nor knows it. But you know it, because it remains with you, and will be in you. (Jn 14:16)...the Advocate, the Holy Spirit that the Father will send in my name, He will teach you everything and remind you of all that I told you. (Jn 14:26)

Greek Orthodox theologian, Nikos A. Nissiotis, an observer at the Second Vatican Council, describes the precise deifying role of the Holy Spirit. In his report, he notes, “The Spirit of Truth is he who opens the historical road to the permanent presence of Christ in history by means of the Church community.”³⁵⁴ He argues that the Holy Spirit leads the Church in history to the realization of the fullness of the truth manifested by the cross and resurrection of Jesus. In the Church, he notes “the Divine Economy becomes reality in time.”³⁵⁵ The Church, therefore, must remain faithful to the Spirit who continually maintains and perfects this body in truth and unity, ultimately leading her into the fullness of the Truth³⁵⁶ and to final deification.

Staniloae concurs with Nissiotis’ thinking regarding the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church. His theology, which is biblically and patristically substantiated, reveals the

³⁵⁴ Nikos A. Nissiotis, “The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church: Extracts from the Report of an Orthodox Observer of the Second Vatican Council” *Ecumenical Review* 18 (1966), 190-206; quoted in Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 49.

³⁵⁵ Nikos A. Nissiotis, “The Holy Spirit and the Sobornicity of the Church: Extracts from the Report of an Orthodox Observer of the Second Vatican Council” *Ecumenical Review* 18 (1966), 190-206; quoted in Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 49.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

unifying, vivifying and deifying role of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Beginning with the events of the first Pentecost, Staniloae submits that, in spite of the differences of language and culture, all those present in the Upper Room were united in a common way of thinking.³⁵⁷ According to Staniloae, the Fathers attribute this unity in diversity to the activity of the Holy Spirit “because from one and the same Spirit the same understanding was poured out upon all and all are brought back into a single harmony...”³⁵⁸ Gregory of Nyssa writes:

Those who were separated into the many various languages all at once shared the same language with the Apostles...For it was necessary that those who had broken the unity of language...when the tower was being built should return to this unity at the moment of the spiritual construction of the Church.³⁵⁹

The unifying force of the Spirit also manifests itself within the community through the various gifts and talents of its members. Flowing from the same Spirit, these gifts are poured out upon humankind for the benefit of the community. When turned into good, these gifts satisfy and complement what is lacking in the entire ecclesial community.³⁶⁰

St. Paul’s letter to the Church of Corinth affirms this teaching of the Fathers:

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit, there are different forms of service but the same Lord: there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom; to another the expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit; to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit; to another mighty deeds; to another prophecy; to another discernment of spirits; to another varieties of tongues; to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as He wishes. (1 Cor 12:4-12)

³⁵⁷ Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 52-53.

³⁵⁸ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Pentecosten Oratio* 41, 16 *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 449C; quoted in Staniloae, *Theology of the Church*, 52.

³⁵⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, “Encomium in S. Stepanum” *Patrologia Graeca* 46, 704D-705A; quoted in Staniloae, *Theology of the Church*, 52.

³⁶⁰ Staniloae, 53-54.

The Spirit becomes the bond and unifying force who establishes the Church as one body. Each unique, singular part together forms a unified whole, giving the Church its character of “sobornicity,”³⁶¹ that is, its catholicity. St. Maximus believes that humanity “profoundly divided as to race, nation, language, manner of life, work, knowledge, honor and fortune”³⁶² is united in the Church through the Holy Spirit. This divine quality is communicated to all believers by the Spirit, transforming them to receive a nature which no longer permits them to consider the many and profound differences among them. In this way, all are united by the power of faith in a way that is truly catholic.³⁶³ The Spirit is the unifying and transforming force of the Church.

In Staniloae’s view, there is a clear distinction between “sobornicity” as a simple unity and “sobornicity” as a particular type of communion.³⁶⁴ He describes sobornicity in these terms:

The unity of communion is the sole unity which conforms to the dignity of the persons involved in the union. It is the sole unity which does not subordinate one person to another, or in which the institution is not conceived as something *external* to or superior to and repressive of the persons involved in it. In the unity of communion, persons are united in equality and the institution is the expression of their communion.³⁶⁵

What characterizes the body, according to Staniloae, is the unity of the members who are uniquely different.³⁶⁶ Staniloae quotes St. Paul. “If all were a single organ, where would

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 54.

³⁶² St. Maximus the Confessor, “Mystagogy I,” *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 665-8; quoted in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 164.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

³⁶⁴ Staniloae, 56.

³⁶⁵ Staniloae, 57.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 57.

the body be?” (1 Cor 12:19) The type of unity that is expressed by sobornicity is the unity brought about by communion that characterizes the Church as catholic.

The unifying force of the Holy Spirit affects the community as a whole and as individuals. St. John Chrysostom identifies a twofold beauty in each person that benefits the common good as well as the person to whom it belongs.³⁶⁷ According to Staniloae, the common element that binds the community together is the Holy Spirit. He is the Principle of unity and diversity, holding all persons together and giving Himself in every age for the service of the Church.³⁶⁸

Precisely because the Holy Spirit gives Himself, He is the divine Person who sustains humanity’s relationship with God, with others and with the world. The Spirit is the “living reality”³⁶⁹ who fills all human longing for communion. The Holy Spirit enables the human person to move outside of [himself/herself] in order to be in the other without confusing or losing the self. This quality is characteristic of the internal life of the divine Persons in the trinitarian *perichoresis*. It forms the foundation for Staniloae’s argument against the *Filioque*.³⁷⁰

[The Holy Spirit] proceeds or flows continually from the Father to the Son, and shines forth upon the Father to the Son on whom He rests. He does not also proceed from the Son because He remains eternally between the Father and the Son. He does not proceed beyond the Son because He has no place to go. And the Spirit cannot proceed from the Son towards the Father because in their mutual relations the Father must maintain unchanged his position as Father and the Son his position as Son.³⁷¹

³⁶⁷ St. John Chrysostom, *Epistola I ad Corinthios, Homilia 30*, 3 *Patrologia Graeca* 61, 253; quoted in Staniloae, 58-59.

³⁶⁸ Staniloae, 61.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*

The Spirit gathers humanity together in the Son as adopted sons and daughters. This same Spirit rests on the Son and binds him to the Father.³⁷² Humanity is thus fraternally bound through the Spirit to Jesus, as well as to one another. The union of all to Christ and to one another constitutes the Church as the Body of Christ in “one filial relation to the Father.”³⁷³ Within this body, the Church, Staniloae claims that *theosis* takes place.³⁷⁴

The outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, claims Staniloae, is the final act of the Trinity in the world. In the tradition of the Fathers, he claims that the Church is the participation of persons within the life of the Trinity, giving human life its profound meaning and theandric mystery.³⁷⁵ “the personal union of God with [humanity] in Christ,”³⁷⁶ which is the foundation of the relationship that God has with humankind through the workings of the Holy Spirit in the Church.³⁷⁷ Communion with God through participation in the Body of Christ is central to Staniloae’s ecclesiology, and highlights the role of the Church and the Holy Spirit.³⁷⁸

The Church is the dialogue of God with the faithful through Christ in the Holy Spirit. This dialogue, conducted formerly by the Word from afar, becomes an intimate dialogue through the incarnation of the Son of God as [human] and begins to spread through the Church. The Church, is, thus, that supernatural revelation concluded in Christ as it exercises its effect upon us in the course of time through the Holy Spirit. It is supernatural revelation—which has reached its fullness in Christ—in the act of spreading and bringing forth much fruit in those who believe. The Church is Christ united in the Holy Spirit with those who believe and over whom has been

³⁷² *Ibid.*

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 64.

³⁷⁴ Bartos, 252.

³⁷⁵ A Maximian term, “theandric” is to be interpreted as “divine and human energy in co-operation, not a mixed form of both” as evidenced in *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 1056B; quoted in Thunberg, 35. For Maximus, what matters “is to apply the attributes of both natures in relation to their common unity...always without change or confusion,” as he writes in *Epistulae* 21, *Patrologia Graeca* 91, 604B; quoted in Thunberg, 36.

³⁷⁶ Bartos, 252.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 252-253.

spread and through whom is spreading Christ's own act of drawing the faithful—by means of dialogue with them—into the process of growing into his likeness.³⁷⁹

Staniloae's ecclesiology is clearly trinitarian in nature. It faithfully upholds the "indissoluble connection"³⁸⁰ of the Son and the Holy Spirit in God's divine plan for the deification and salvation of humankind.³⁸¹

As Bartos indicates, Staniloae's understanding of Eastern Christian ecclesiology is modeled on the life of communion in the Trinity.³⁸² He notes,

The Church [is] the coming of eternity into time, an icon or manifestation of the Trinity, Christ's *mysterium*, or His theophany...Consequently, in the East the principle of unity in the Church finds its deepest foundation in the idea of communion."³⁸³

Staniloae argues that the Church must be a reflection of the mutual love and reciprocity that is shared within the Trinity, the divine *perichoresis*. The spiritual life of the Church should mirror the self-giving nature of the Trinity to manifest God's presence to the world and to bring the world to God.³⁸⁴ Through the grace of the Holy Spirit, the Church must strive to continue the salvific work of Christ, pouring out trinitarian life and love upon the human family. Once immersed in this communion, the faithful share in the fullness of the eternal gift of sharing in divine life. Communion in divine love transforms and deifies human love in such a way that the world becomes transformed and deified by those who immerse themselves in God.³⁸⁵ In this way, the Church becomes "the *locus* where the eternal plan of the Trinity is accomplished."³⁸⁶ According to St. Gregory

³⁷⁹ Staniloae, *The Expeience of God*, 38.

³⁸⁰ Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 106.

³⁸¹ Bartos, 253-254.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 269.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 270.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 254-255.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 258.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 255.

Nazianzen, the Church must foster spiritual growth in Christ because of humanity's

vocation to *theosis*.³⁸⁷ Bartos notes Staniloae's trinitarian vision of the Church:

And this power comes forth from the perfect altruistic model given by the trinitarian relationships. In virtue of the trinitarian *perichoresis* of the common energy and action, the Son imparts the love shared by the divine Persons to believers. In this way, the believers themselves participate in the divine-human life of Christ through the grace of the Spirit. The Church, therefore, appears as the *locus* where the eternal plan of the Trinity is accomplished, and as the common medium of salvation and deification of humankind according to grace, in Christ and through Christ. The life poured into the Church at Pentecost, in which the Church participates by grace, is the life of Christ Himself, through which the trinitarian life is introduced into our life.³⁸⁸

Humanity's vocation to *theosis* is a high calling. Nevertheless, God empowers [him/her] by grace to share the divine *perichoresis* of love through the life of Christ poured into the Church by the Holy Spirit.

In the Upper Room at Pentecost, God pours out His Spirit in a fire branding the gathered faithful as the Church. Their mission is one: to offer "the whole treasury of goods which are to be found in Christ,"³⁸⁹ the promise of eternal participation in the fullness of trinitarian life and love. Through the vivifying, unifying and deifying Spirit, Christ's salvific presence is communicated to the Church so that all creation can be gathered, sanctified and transformed. The foundation for this ascent to communion with God, to *theosis*, is the Church of Christ.

Baptism and Eucharist: The Means of *Theosis*

It is in the Church that humanity's movement toward its ultimate destiny of *theosis* is launched, kept afloat and projected toward its eschatological fulfillment. In the

³⁸⁷ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *In Laudem Basilii Magni* 43, 48 *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 560A; quoted in Bartos, 255.

³⁸⁸ Bartos, 255.

³⁸⁹ Staniloae, *The Experience of God*, 77.

age to come, this union will be consummated and “the Church will appear in its eternal glory as the Kingdom of God.”³⁹⁰ St. Seraphim of Sarov describes the vision of the Eastern Church: “For the true end of the Christian life is the acquiring of the Holy Spirit.”³⁹¹ The sacramental life of the Church is the means whereby the Holy Spirit is imparted to the faithful. His deifying role in the sacramental life of the Church is hailed by Stavropoulos:

The Holy mysteries [sacraments] are what transmit this grace of the All-Holy Spirit. His sanctifying and deifying energy is actualized in the holy services of the Church, especially in holy Baptism, Repentance and the Divine Eucharist. It is fulfilled and completed with prayer and love.³⁹²

Staniloae adds that divine grace is the work of the Trinity, primarily the deifying energy of the Holy Spirit. Of this link between divine grace and deifying energy, he notes:

Taking these sayings as a foundation, ‘and the doctrine of the Spirit who proceeds from the Father and shines forth in the light of the Spirit,’ the Fathers regarded the Holy Spirit as the person who brings into souls divine energy, which becomes in them the capacity for knowing God and loving Him.³⁹³

Divine grace has, according to Staniloae, an “inexhaustible power that comes from the infinite divinity placed in the humanity of Christ”³⁹⁴ and completes the human desire for transcendence.³⁹⁵ Poured out to the faithful by the Holy Spirit through the deified humanity of Christ, divine grace assists in humanity’s deification. Within the framework of Christian life, the mysteries are the means by which the Holy Spirit imparts divinizing

³⁹⁰ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 178.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 196.

³⁹² Stavropoulos, 37-38.

³⁹³ Dumitru Staniloae, “The Holy Spirit in the Theology and Life of the Orthodox Church,” *Sobornost* 7.1 (1975), 5; quoted in Bartos, 283.

³⁹⁴ Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, 304; quoted in Bartos, 285.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

grace, making the human heart capable of receiving this gift.³⁹⁶ Divine grace, therefore, is the energy of the Holy Spirit and the effect of the energy on the believer.³⁹⁷

The presence of grace enables the human person to collaborate with the operations of the Holy Spirit so that the sacramental life of the Church becomes the means of *theosis*.

According to Schmemmann, Baptism opens the way for the faithful to receive the Holy Spirit and become living members of the Body of Christ.³⁹⁸ As the sacrament that launches the faithful on their journey to *theosis*, Baptism entitles those who are buried in the waters of regeneration, to the fullness of life in Christ offered in the Church.³⁹⁹ As the Spirit pours divine grace into the Church, the faithful who are marked with the seal of Christ are made sharers in His cross, death, resurrection, ascension and glorification.

The teachings of the Fathers of the Church disclose the link between Baptism and humanity's vocation to *theosis*. St. Cyril of Alexandria posits that *theosis* occurs as a result of union with Christ by faith, and a conversion of the heart that is confessed through Baptism. The divine grace of the Holy Spirit illuminates believers, making them adopted sons and daughters of God in the image of the Son.⁴⁰⁰ St. Basil claims that the activity of the Holy Spirit in Baptism opens the way to deification in this life and the life to come:

It follows that if there is any grace in the water, it is not of the nature of the water, but of the presence of the Spirit. For Baptism is not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience towards God...Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our

³⁹⁶ Bartos, 285-286.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 287.

³⁹⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 116.

³⁹⁹ Fairbairn, 89.

⁴⁰⁰ Gross, 225.

being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all ‘fullness of blessing,’ both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise whereof, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment.⁴⁰¹

St. Gregory of Nyssa argues that Baptism is the rebirth into *theosis*:

[It is] a birth which neither begins nor ends with corruption, but one which conducts the person begotten to an immortal existence...so...that which is born may be superior to the corruption of death...when the presence of a Divine influence transforms what is born with a corruptible nature into a state of incorruption.⁴⁰²

St. Gregory Nazianzen proffers that the heavens rejoice in Baptism as the “image of heavenly bliss:”⁴⁰³

It is the aid to our weakness, the renunciation of the flesh, the following of the Spirit, the fellowship of the Word, the improvement of the creature, the overwhelming of sin, the participation of light, the dissolution of darkness. It is the carriage to God, the dying with Christ, the perfecting of the mind, the bulwark of faith, the key of the Kingdom of heaven, the change of life, the removal of slavery, the loosing of chains, the remodeling of the whole man.⁴⁰⁴

The Fathers spoke of Baptism in terms that are indicative of deification. Using language that expresses relationality and fullness of life, they confess that Baptism is the Church’s revelation and actualization of the mystery of the new life in Christ that restores humanity’s relationship with God. Having freely turned back to God by a conversion of heart, the believer, illuminated by the Holy Spirit and adopted by divine grace, enters into the new life in Christ. Refashioned and perfected in the Holy Spirit, [he/she] begins her

⁴⁰¹ St. Basil the Great, *De Spiritu Sancto* XV 35-36, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.

VIII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 20.

⁴⁰² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* XXXIII, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 501.

⁴⁰³ St. Gregory Nazianzen, *Oration on Holy Baptism* XL, III-IV, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 360.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

journey to the promise of incorruption and fullness of blessings in eternal union with God.

Staniloae's personalist approach views Baptism as the mystery that initiates a dialogue between God and the believer. Having sensitized the faithful to the presence of the divine within the soul, Baptism breaks open the depths of the human heart and soul to divine grace so that Christ, the "priest and mediator" may enter:⁴⁰⁵

The place where He [Christ] resides as the High Priest is the deepest room, the most mysterious and pure space of our heart, because only that part can become truly sensitive and opened to God. Only the virtual human depth may open itself to the endless divine depth.⁴⁰⁶

Staniloae claims that the Holy Spirit transforms the baptismal waters into Christ's saving acts so that those who receive this mystery are united to Christ and his saving acts.⁴⁰⁷ By this transforming union, the faithful enter into relationship with the Father through the grace of the Holy Spirit and begin the journey of *theosis*.⁴⁰⁸

To nurture and sustain the faithful, Christ gives Himself as the appropriate food and drink, the Bread of Life who deifies those who receive Him: Gregory of Nyssa affirms the deifying character of the Eucharist:

By this communion with Deity [humankind] might at the same time be deified, for this end it is that, by dispensation of His grace, He disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh, whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union with the immortal, [humankind], too may be a sharer in incorruption. He gives these gifts by virtue of the benediction through which He [changes] the natural quality of these visible things to that immortal thing.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰⁵ Bartos, 295.

⁴⁰⁶ Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă*, vol. II, 354; quoted in Bartos, 295.

⁴⁰⁷ Bartos, 300.

⁴⁰⁸ Bartos, 300-302.

⁴⁰⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism XXXVII, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 506.

St. Ambrose exhorts the faithful to eat and drink of the divine food that is Christ

Himself:⁴¹⁰

Wherefore, too, the Church, beholding so great grace, exhorts her sons [and daughters] and her friends to come together to the sacraments, saying: 'Eat, my friends, and drink and be inebriated, my brother [and sister].' What we eat and what we drink, the Holy Spirit has elsewhere made plain by the prophet saying, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good, blessed is the [one] who [hopes] in Him. 'In that sacrament is Christ, because it is the body of Christ, it is therefore not bodily food but spiritual.'⁴¹¹

St. John of Damascus argues that the Eucharist provides deification to the body as well as the soul:

For the new life given at Baptism, an appropriate food is necessary which enables it to 'attain to the measure of perfection.'⁴¹² This food is none other than 'the bread of the altar, as well as the wine and the water, which by the invocation and presence of the Holy Spirit are marvelously...changed into the body of Christ and his blood, to the point of being no longer two things but one and the same thing.'⁴¹³ The fruits of the Eucharistic communion extend to the body and to the soul of those who 'receive it with faith and justly.' These are the remission of sins, the safeguard for the soul and body, 'incorruptibility with a view to the enjoyment of eternal bliss,'⁴¹⁴ indeed, even the participation in the divinity of Jesus.⁴¹⁵

St. John admits of the deifying nature of both Baptism and Eucharist, but makes it clear that it is in the Eucharist, in particular, that one is deified.⁴¹⁶ He compares the "divine and life-giving virtue"⁴¹⁷ in the body of the Lord to the burning coal that sets ablaze and assimilates all that it touches:

We draw near to it with a fervent desire and, after crossing our hands, we receive the body of the crucified One. After applying our eyes, lips, and forehead to it, we take the divine coal in order that the fire of our desire, increased by the heat of the

⁴¹⁰ St. Ambrose, *On the Mysteries* IX, 55, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.X (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 325.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, IX, 58.

⁴¹² St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4,13 (1137); quoted in Gross, 262.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, (1153a).

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, (1148).

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, (1153a).

⁴¹⁶ Gross, 262.

⁴¹⁷ St. John of Damascus, *De Fide Orthodoxa* 4.13 (1152b-c); quoted in Gross, 262.

coal, may consume our sins and enlighten our hearts, in order that by participation in the divine fire we may be set ablaze and deified [θεωθωμεν].⁴¹⁸

In the liturgical tradition of the Eastern Church, the faithful recite St. John's prayer before Eucharistic reception. It is a prayer that heralds the divinizing nature of Christ's body and blood. This trinitarian doxology affirms that the Eucharistic mystery prepares the faithful for the fullness of *theosis* in the age to come:

I am wounded in my heart. Your fervor made me melt, your love changed me, O Master. I am a prisoner of your love. Let me be filled with your flesh; let me be satiated with your life-giving and deifying blood; let me have enjoyment of your good things; let me be filled with the delights of your Godhead. Make me worthy to meet you, when You come in glory, caught up in the air in the clouds with your chosen ones, as I hymn and worship and glorify You with thanksgiving and confession, together with your Father without beginning and your all-holy and good and life-giving Spirit, now, and forever, and to the ages of ages.⁴¹⁹

Extolling the union of the holy flesh of Christ with human flesh, St. Symeon the New Theologian, writes that the Eucharistic union imparts a divine fire into the communicant. "I, who am but straw, receive the Fire, and—unheard of wonder—am inflamed without being consumed, as of old 'the burning bush of Moses.'"⁴²⁰ Like the Fathers, Staniloae concurs that the Eucharistic mystery is the summit of communion with Christ, whereby the faithful are fed the food of eternal life.⁴²¹ Christ's deified body communicates His divinity to the body and soul of those who are touched by Him in this mystery and offered a share in divine trinitarian life:

The Word of God took a body to gather into himself; in the mystery of God's unity with creation, not only souls but also bodies. As the body of Christ is not only an intuitive symbol of deification separated from him...in like manner our body can be united in a real way with the divinity of Christ, by touching it to the body of Christ.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, (1149a-b); quoted in Gross, 262.

⁴¹⁹ St. John of Damascus; quoted in Louth, 251.

⁴²⁰ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *La Vie Spirituelle* XXVII, 3 (1931), 309-310; quoted in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 181.

⁴²¹ Bartos, 296.

It is an experience analogous with the way the power of Christ poured from his body, through his clothes, towards those who were ill and touched him. But, because the Body of Christ became pneumatized and invisible by the ascension, remaining however a clothed body, the way our body is touched by his body is no longer visible; rather, the matter linked with our bodies is used.⁴²²

The Eucharist, “the sacrament of deification,”⁴²³ true body and blood of Christ, is the visible and tangible means whereby the faithful share in Christ’s divinity. Those who eat and drink of the Bread of Life eternal are deified through Him and brought into the fullness of life in the Trinity.

Conclusion

In light of the liturgical movement that surfaced in the late twentieth century in both Eastern and Western Christianity, Fr. Alexander Schmemmann declared that a Eucharistic crisis was eroding the very foundations of the Church. Submitting that the root cause of this condition emerged from a secularistic worldview, he concluded that Christians were suffering from liturgical indifference and liturgical ignorance. Far removed in spirit from the experience of the early Church, twentieth century Christians were becoming increasingly unconscious of the intrinsic connection between what was being accomplished in the Eucharist and how the liturgical experience was understood and incorporated in their lives. To this end, Schmemmann posited a need to rediscover the Eucharist in the spirit and the vision of the early Church. Schmemmann’s appeal prompts the thesis of this investigation. True Eucharistic renewal demands a retrieval of the doctrine of *theosis*, the theological vision of the Eastern Fathers, in order to uncover the organic connection that informs, illuminates and enhances Eucharistic understanding.

⁴²² Staniloae, *Teologia Dogmatică Ortodoxă* vol. III, 18; quoted in Bartos, 301.

⁴²³ Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Lectures and Essays on Christian Development through Liturgical Experience* (New York: Department of Religious Education, Orthodox Church of America, 1974), 21.

Father Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology provides the most cogent evidence in support of the claim that the Eucharist is the "sacrament of deification."⁴²⁴

The Greek term, *theosis*, translated as deification or divinization, was coined by the early Fathers of the Church to describe the vocation and ultimate goal of humanity: to participate in divine nature and to be united in an eternal communion of love with God. As the central theological vision of the Eastern Christian Church, *theosis* is the call to know the mystery of God as Father, Son and Holy Spirit and to share in trinitarian life. Its origins can be traced to the doctrine of *perichoresis*, a teaching that articulates the mutual indwelling and the shared being of the trinity of divine Persons. Trinitarian *perichoresis* describes the love and knowledge that each divine Person has for the other in Himself. St. Maximus the Confessor formulated the doctrine in its christological and soteriological dimensions. These doctrinal expansions served to describe the mutual interpenetration of the divine and human natures in the Person of Christ, as well as to identify the nature of the relationship between God and all created existence. *Theosis*, humanity's sharing in the Being of the wholly other, the ultimate destiny of the human person, originates in *perichoresis*.

Divine love freely wills to move outside of Itself toward the other. By virtue of His supreme and infinite goodness, God creates beings to share in his divine plenitude. The world is given to them as a gift and the revelation that all created existence is destined for the glory of deification. Staniloae posits that the ontological connection of the human person to the world reveals that it, too, will be transformed and deified. Held

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

together by the *Logos*, all of God's creation will return to Him in fulfillment of His eternal plan. *Theosis* has its first movement in creation.

The Holy Spirit reveals the mysteries of the triune God to humanity in the Church. His activity establishes, maintains and sanctifies the Church, leading her to the Truth. As coequal and coeternal with the Son, the Holy Spirit rests on the Son and gathers all believers to Him. Adopted by the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit, the faithful are united to Christ through whom they are made sharers in divine life. Through the Holy Spirit, the conversation between God and the world is made possible. The Church is the *locus* of the eternal plan of the Trinity, the sphere of *theosis*.

The sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist, are the means by which Christians fulfill their vocation to *theosis*. Those who receive the Holy Spirit in Baptism become adopted sons and daughters of God and receive the promise of divine inheritance: eternal life in communion with the Divine Trinity of Persons. United with Christ in the Eucharist, the faithful are transformed by His deified humanity and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Thus, they grow in likeness to Christ as they increase in virtue. Through the sacraments, the Holy Spirit continues to build up, to sanctify and to deify the Church so that She might fulfill her mission to the world to sanctify, to redeem and to deify all of creation.

If the Church of the third millennium is to continue to fulfill her mission in this world, then the theological community must heed Schmemmann's clarion call to address the current Eucharistic crisis that exists in the Christian Church and, simultaneously, in the world. The doctrine of *theosis* offers a viable means of retrieving the spirit and vision of the early Church. Placed in dialogue with Eucharistic theology, *theosis* reclaims the

Church as the Sacrament of the Presence of the Kingdom of God in this world and the foretaste of the life to come. More significantly, the intrinsic connection between the Eucharist and the doctrine of *theosis* verifies that the Eucharist is the “sacrament of deification,”⁴²⁵ the means by which God calls all creation into His Being.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

CHAPTER TWO

“ENGAGING EASTERN CHRISTIANITY ON ITS OWN TERMS”¹

Introduction

The ultimate destiny of the human person is union with God. Throughout history, the path to achieve this goal has been defined in as many ways as there are religions to describe them. Christian understanding of the way to union with God is formulated in the doctrine of salvation. Critical to this teaching is the confession that the sin of the first ancestors brought death into the world, making union with God impossible. Through Christ, the divine economy of the trinity of Persons is accomplished so that humankind’s destiny might be restored.

While this theological tenet remains constant for all Christians, historical realities have not. In fact, the Church of Christ throughout time has suffered from political restraint, cultural exclusion, religious persecution and personal conflicts of interest from within. These factors and others were responsible for the division of the Church into the Eastern and Western traditions. Known as the Church of Rome and the Church of Byzantium, both traditions inherited an identity based upon its vision of the world, of life, and of Christianity.”² The scope of these dissimilarities had far reaching implications for critical theological themes³ regarding human life and salvation.⁴ Fairbairn argues that at “the heart of the differences between Eastern and Western Christianity” is the understanding of the creation, vocation, fall and salvation of humanity.⁵ Differences, he

¹ Fairbairn, 2.

² Fairbairn, 2,5.

³ *Ibid.*, 65.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁵ *Ibid.*

claims, which lie more in emphasis and approach than in contradictions, but noteworthy differences, nevertheless.⁶

To demonstrate the differing theological approaches to ways of thinking about human nature, human destiny and *theosis*, Fairbairn posits two salvation models that he argues, are representative of the Eastern and Western traditions respectively. God's act of creation, humanity's fall into sin, and God's act of redemption constitute the three-act model of salvation that is endorsed by Western Christians. This approach upholds the view that the human person was created in a state of perfect fellowship with God, a condition that was forfeited after the fall into sin. God's action to redeem fallen humanity restored humanity to "a state resembling the original created condition."⁷ Western soteriology places great emphasis on Christian initiation and conversion as a means of changing one's condition before God.⁸ In the Eastern Christian tradition, salvation has consistently been characterized by *theosis*, a foundation that has given balance, direction and wholeness to all theological development. *Theosis* "is hidden in God in eternity, made known to us in Christ, and made constantly present to us in the life of the Christian Church through the Holy Spirit of God,"⁹ writes Aghiorgoussis. The Eastern two-act model maintains that God created humanity for union with Him through *theosis*. The first act of creation is interpreted in the Eastern tradition to mean that humanity has the capacity for union with God but is not perfectly united with Him in this

⁶ *Ibid*, 93.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 76.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁹ Maximos Aghiorgoussis, *In the Image of God: Studies in Scripture, Theology and Community* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 115.

state. Humankind achieves this potential through *theosis*. Elevation is the fulfillment of the vocation to *theosis*. Having passed through this earthly life, the deified are raised to “a new level of beatitude”¹⁰ beyond human experience and knowledge.¹¹ Elevation is the achievement of the fullness of human destiny and human vocation that actuates *theosis*.¹² The Eastern model continually focuses on the deification of the human person and the ultimate divinization of the entire created cosmos. Seen in this light, salvation is a continual process toward union with God. The Eastern tradition situates this teaching in the saving work of Christ and the personal application of this event by the Holy Spirit of God.¹³

Fairbairn’s models prove that different approaches to salient Christian themes can produce differing theological orientations. He summarizes the difference between the two models of salvation:

...a three-act scheme emphasizes salvation as a restoration to the original beatitude, the state that had been lost with the fall. A two-act scheme stresses ‘vocation’ as an elevation to a new level of beatitude, something never before experienced by humanity.¹⁴

Despite differences in theological orientation, language or soteriological emphasis, union with God remains a constant and dominant theme in both traditions.¹⁵

What follows in Chapter Two serves to engage Eastern Christianity on its own terms in order to understand how the doctrine of *theosis* influences soteriological thought.

¹⁰ Fairbairn, 77.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Aghiorgoussis, 115.

¹⁴ Fairbairn, 77.

¹⁵ Kärkäinen, 4.

Using Fairbairn's proposed models of salvation as a guide, this chapter will explore the themes of creation, the fall of humanity, redemption, and elevation from an Eastern Christian perspective. Contributing to the conversation are the voices of Staniloae, Lossky, Ware and other prominent Eastern theologians. Their work reflects that of the Eastern Fathers whose theological vision was grounded in *theosis*.

The Chapter begins with Staniloae's insights into the meaning of creation as fullness of communion with God. It will address the role of the human person who is called to transform the earth and reunite it with [himself/herself] in union with God. It will also explore the meaning of being made in the image of God, being made in the image of the Trinity, and being made in the image of the Image of God.

The second section of this chapter borrows the theme of the second act of the western model of salvation, the Fall, and interprets it from an Eastern Christian stance. This exposition argues that Eastern theology regards the fall of humanity as a turning away from the call to *theosis*. Sin is viewed in terms of relationship. This view does not place the human person in a condition significantly different from the created state. Humanity's primordial state is not regarded as perfect in nature, but as a state of sinlessness having the potential for immortality. When Adam and Eve chose to turn away from God, the innocence of the primordial state was ended. This fact proves that God is not the author of evil, but that evil is located in the will of human nature and is a

free and deliberate choice against God, This section will close with a theological analysis of the post-lapsarian state of humankind referred to as “the garments of skin.”¹⁶

The third and final section of Chapter Two proposes that elevation, the second act of salvation in Fairbairn’s Eastern model, offers a vision of salvation that extends beyond the Western model of redemption to deification. This approach demonstrates that God descends to humankind in the Incarnation, raising humanity and all creation to a higher level of being. Through the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church, the ark of salvation, humanity finds the means necessary for *theosis*.

Fairbarin’s models of salvation challenge Christians of both traditions to enter into dialogue about salvation issues more open-mindedly. This requires that both parties commit to engage one another’s theological perspectives without bias and judgment. The viability of this investigation is dependent upon an authentic understanding of the themes of creation, fallen humanity, salvation, redemption, and elevation as they are understood in Eastern Christian theology. Approached in this light, Western Christian thought is enriched and expanded. Boundaries that are often nothing short of refusal to dialogue, or much worse, boundaries created by human ignorance, begin to disappear. Hope is restored that reconciliation is indeed possible.

The Meaning of Creation

The economy of God, that is, His plan with regard to the world, consists in the deification of the created world, something which, as a consequence of sin, implies also its salvation. The salvation and the deification of the world presuppose, as primal divine act, its creation. Salvation and deification undoubtedly have humanity directly as their aim but not a humanity separated from nature, rather, one that is ontologically

¹⁶ Nellas, 43.

united with it. For nature depends on [humankind] or makes [them] whole, and [humankind] cannot reach perfection if [they] do not reflect nature and are not at work upon it.¹⁷

The interdependence of humanity and the cosmos is eternally imprinted in God's purpose for creating: the deification of the entire created world. It is announced in the creation account, "The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground." (Genesis 2:7) In the Rite of Ashes, the faithful are reminded of their connection to created nature.¹⁸ The human person possesses a cosmic nature that bears with it a responsibility for the salvation and perfection of nature. It is the theme of Staniloae's cosmic transfiguration theology.

Nature, likewise, contributes to the deification of humanity as the means by which divine grace is received.¹⁹ God's gift of the world is endowed with an ever-renewing principle that provides sustenance for all generations. Working together in solidarity, humankind has the freedom to develop and maintain this gift of God as a means of striving towards the Giver of the gift, a means of growth in *theosis*.²⁰ If, on the other hand, humanity abuses or destroys nature, striving for its own selfish gains, the gift of God ceases to be a means of solidarity or deification.²¹

Made in God's image, humankind is set over the earth and empowered to transform it. The creation account testifies to humanity's kingly vocation: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit

¹⁷ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 1.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 2.

on it to be your food.” (Gen.1:29) Human capacity to care for the earth is dependent upon the work done through the physical body.²² Consider the wheat and the grapes that are made into the Eucharistic gifts of bread and wine to be offered to God.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made. It will become for us the bread of life.

Blessed are you, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands. It will become our spiritual drink.²³

Human capacity to transform and sanctify the world originates in the creative nature of God. By cooperating with divine grace, human work becomes a reflection of God’s creative power.²⁴ Receiving the earth as gift, humans work in solidarity with each other to offer the entire cosmos as gift to God in return.

The reciprocal giving and receiving of the world is what Staniloae calls the dialogue between the Creator and His creation. In this sense, the world becomes an utterance of God, a word that became reality through the Word of God.²⁵ As Scripture reveals, “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came to be through Him, and without Him nothing came to be.” (Jn 1:1-4) The Word is the “divine nexus”²⁶ between

²² *Ibid.*, 51.

²³ Daughters of St. Paul, “Liturgy of the Eucharist: Preparation of the Altar and Gifts, “*The Vatican II Weekday Missal* (Boston: St. Paul Editions, 1975), 848.

²⁴ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 5.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

²⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 99.

the infinite and the finite. Through Him all things were made and have their being, their *logoi*, and their point of focus toward their final fulfillment in *theosis*.²⁷

In Staniloae's view, the true transformation of the human person occurs in the offering back of the gift of the world to God. Staniloae finds this to be a paradox.

...The gift received and returned draws the persons close to one another to such an extent that the object of the gift becomes something common and comes to be the transparent means for the fullest communion between persons.²⁸

Thus, the giver of the gift takes on more meaning than the gift itself because of the communion that takes place between the giver and the receiver. This gift of the world is also intended by God to be shared among all people and offered in solidarity to God. In this fashion, all persons in loving solidarity will be taken up into God's eternal, divine love in communion with each other and with God.²⁹

The pages of history are replete with examples of the abuse of human freedom in refusing to receive the world as a gift from God. Greedily received by humanity as an end in itself, the earth has suffered from pollution, destruction and extinction. Peoples and entire nations have been ravaged by violence, oppression and wars, which continually thwart God's purpose for creation. Florovsky observes that everything in creation depends on the autonomous nature of human freedom. "Without this autonomy," he writes, "nothing happens in creation."³⁰ Florovsky posits that human

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 98-99.

²⁸ Staniloae, 22.

²⁹ Staniloae, 26-27.

³⁰ Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works of Georges Florovsky*, vol. 3, *Creation and Redemption* (Belmont: Nordland Publishing Co., 1976), 49.

freedom manifests itself in two directions: “to God and away from God.”³¹ Although creation is ultimately destined for union with God and participation in divine life, he notes that humankind must choose this ascent to God by its own efforts. In doing so, humanity’s true vocation is realized. By rejecting union with God, he adds, the possibility of existence in death remains because “creation does not cease to exist.”³² Death does not end its existence, but separates creation from God, making true being impossible.³³ Deification for the created world becomes impossible when human freedom is abused by turning away from God.

Staniloae believes that the true purpose and fulfillment of the world comes about through humankind.³⁴ Created with a consciousness, the human person is capable of transcending the laws of nature and their repetition, in order to realize the meaning of the created world in God’s economy.³⁵

Through its flexible or contingent rationality, and the meanings that humans can perceive through it, the world is at the service of this movement of raising ourselves to our ultimate meaning or, indeed, of achieving our fullness in communion with the personal God. All these things impose on us a responsibility before God and before the world itself, and it is by the exercise of this responsibility that we increase in our communion with God and with our fellow human beings...³⁶

This capacity of the human spirit is contingent upon the physical nature of the body to actualize its decisions through human labor. Staniloae argues that only through the work of the human body can nature be transformed and spiritualized, proving that the world

³¹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁴ Staniloae, 18-19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

was truly created for the sake of the human person.³⁷ He writes, “The goal of the body is that the human spirit should be at work through it to transfigure and render spiritual the whole cosmos, the whole of nature.”³⁸ Accordingly, the human body must be revered for the decisive role it plays in the deification of the created world. Such an awareness of one’s vocation serves to instill in the human person a sense of self-worth, while at the same time, it enhances the dignity of the human person and the sacred character of human labor. The full meaning of the world, then, is realized in and through human efforts to transfigure and sanctify the world and to offer it as gift to God in solidarity with others.

Theosis is the meaning of creation. For Staniloae, there is an inherent relational dynamic that exists between God, the Creator, and His creation. It manifests itself in the giving of the created world as gift to humanity and in the possibility of its return to the Creator.³⁹ According to Florovsky, “In creation, there is projected from out of nothing, a new reality which becomes the bearer of the Divine idea, and must realize this idea in its own becoming.”⁴⁰ Creation is, as Maximus argues, the first act of *theosis*,⁴¹ the expressed tangible means by which all of creation can realize its true being in union with the eternal divine Creator.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 51.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 55.

³⁹ Bria, *The World: Creation and Deification*, ix-x.

⁴⁰ Florovsky, 61.

⁴¹ Thunberg, 457.

Creation: A Spiritual Geocentrism

According to Lossky, theology inherits a geocentric character through divine revelation.⁴² Patristic cosmology reveals the truth about the salvation of humanity related to the conditions of the human person's life on earth. Geocentrism understood in this light, is not to be confused with mere scientific theory about the workings of the universe. Rather, as Lossky posits, spiritual geocentrism is "the mystery of salvation that is revealed to [all humankind] through the Church."⁴³ It is rooted in the belief that the human person is the summit of creation within whom the earthly and the spiritual are united.⁴⁴ Gregory of Nyssa explains:

For this reason [humankind] was brought into this world last after the creation, not being rejected to the last as worthless, but as one whom it behooved to be king over his subjects at his very birth...the rich and munificent Entertainer of our nature when He had decked the habitation with beauties of every kind, and prepared this great and varied banquet, then introduced [humankind], assigning to [them] as [their] task not the acquiring of what was not there, but the enjoyment of the things which were there; and for this reason He gives [them] as foundations the instincts of the two-fold organization, blending the divine with the earthy, that by means of both [they] may be naturally and properly disposed to each enjoyment, enjoying God by means of [their] more divine nature, and the good things of earth by the sense that is akin to them.⁴⁵

In Gregory's view, the human person was created as kin to both heaven and earth. As such, [he/she] is endowed with the capacity to participate in both worlds, and to mediate the transformation of the cosmos. St. Basil argues that the world is meant to serve the human person. He posits that the animals are given to humanity to instruct them about

⁴² Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 105.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 64.

⁴⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* II, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 390.

the meaning of life. They are a manifestation of the love of the Creator towards all beings, and a revelation of the need for humankind to prepare for a future beyond the earth. One's actions must always tend toward one's future deification.

What lessons do these animals teach [humankind]? Then we ought not to attach ourselves to this present life and ought to give heed to that which is to come. Will you not be industrious for yourself, O [humankind]? And will you not lay up in the present age rest in that which is to come, after having seen the example of the ant?⁴⁶

Basil's analogy points to the revelatory nature of the created world and echoes

Staniloae's position that God dialogues with humanity through the gift of the world.

Permeated with the doctrine of union with God, patristic theology reveals that God's plan for the salvation of humankind is inserted in the created world.⁴⁷

Lossky posits that the human person shares a cosmic unity with the created world. As the channel through which the world speaks and receives grace, the human person becomes the *logos* for the world.⁴⁸ After having created the human person, God blessed him, "God looked at everything He had made, and He found it very good." (Gen 1:31) God's blessing on all created existence affirms the beauty and perfection of creation. It also announces that creation lends itself to the fulfillment of "its end in accordance with His creative purpose..." especially as the whole of creation works together.⁴⁹ St. Basil believes that before the creation of the human person, the earth was without plants to provide food. He notes that Scripture speaks of the earth as "invisible and unfinished."

⁴⁶ St. Basil, *The Hexaemeron, Homily IX, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.VIII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 103.

⁴⁷ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 64.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴⁹ St. Basil, *The Hexaemeron, Homily II, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 8.

(Gen 1:2)⁵⁰ Basil proposes that “It may be because [humankind], the spectator, did not exist...”⁵¹ Lossky concludes that humanity and creation are linked together according to God’s plan. Like Basil, he turns to Scripture: “there was no [human] to till the soil,” (Gen 2:5) God had not yet brought forth the plants, “...no grass of the field had sprouted.” (Gen 2: 5)⁵² God’s creative purpose for humankind is thus manifested as the “principle of creation”⁵³ who shares an interdependent unity with the created world.

Lossky adds that the human person receives life when God breathes into his nostrils.⁵⁴ According to Staniloae, God does not give the earth a command to produce a body, but He fashions the man from the dust of the earth. Staniloae notes that “[man and woman] [are] constituted of two elements, body and soul, and that the body is from matter in general, while the soul has a special kinship to God.”⁵⁵ God’s breath into the man’s nostrils gives him an existence of special relationship to God and to nature. The human person becomes the “the mediator of the Spirit of God to the whole of nature and the priest of the entire cosmos”⁵⁶ In Staniloae’s view, God’s manner of creating the human person distinguishes [him/her] from the rest of creation and suggests that God made the human body “for the sake of the soul.”⁵⁷ St. Gregory Nazianzen writes of the kinship the human person shares with God:

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 59

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² Lossky, 68.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁵⁵ Staniloae, *The World: Creation and Deification*, 80.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 81.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

The Word of God taking a portion of the newly created earth, has with his own immortal hands fashioned our frame, and imparted life to it: since the spirit which he breathed into it, is an effluence (ἀπορροή) of the invisible Divinity. Thus out of the dust, and out of the breath, man was created in the image of the Immortal, for in both the spiritual nature reigns supreme. That is why being but dust, I am bound to the life here below: having also a divine part (θεῖον μέρος) I carry in my breast, the longing for eternal life.⁵⁸

The particle of divinity in the human person is the grace of the Holy Spirit, the principle of existence that makes of [him/her] the summit of God's creation.

God places the human person in the garden He had made for him and instructs the man to “cultivate and care for it.” (Gen 2:15) Maximus argues that inherent within this divinely appointed task to cultivate and care for the garden is the teaching that humanity was to unite itself to all of creation. According to Lossky:

It was the divinely appointed function of the first man, according to St. Maximus, to unite in himself the whole of created being; and at the same time to reach his perfect union with God and thus grant the state of deification to the whole creation.⁵⁹

Endowed with freedom and obedient to God's command, the human person would fulfill [his/her] vocation to draw all creation with [him/her] into union and participation with divinity, i.e., the deification of the whole of creation.⁶⁰

God addresses the truth about salvation and deification in and through creation. He reveals the man's need and capacity for communion by providing him animals for his use. As Staniloae observes, Adam names each of them with his ability to speak, an

⁵⁸ St. Gregory Nazianzen, “*Poemata dogmatica*,” VIII, περὶ ψυχῆς, vv. 70-7, *Patrologia Graeca* t. 37, 452; quoted in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 117.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

indication of man's need for communion and his power to think.⁶¹ By means of thought, the human person discovers the infinite God, other persons and the whole of creation. The ability to think is power that gives the human person the ability to give glory and praise to God⁶² and to discover the meaning and purpose of existence. As [he/she] grows in knowledge of the meaning of the world, the human person will discover that God is the meaning of all things, who alone satisfies humanity's need for knowledge and communion.⁶³

The animals, however, did not satisfy Adam's need for companionship. As Lossky observes, the nature of the human person requires a communion of love.⁶⁴ Therefore, a true partner for the man could only be one who shares his nature. And so, God forms the woman, "consubstantial"⁶⁵ with him, "bone of his bones and flesh of his flesh."⁶⁶ (Gen 2:23) The singular and the plural in the human creature now points to the mystery of the singular and the plural in God.⁶⁷ As the Fathers have noted, the creation of Eve correlates to the procession of the Holy Spirit. Just as Eve is different from Adam but shares his same nature, so, too, the Spirit of God differs from the Father from whom He proceeds, but shares in the unity of His divine nature.⁶⁸ Therefore, only a being of

⁶¹ Staniloae, 38.

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Lossky, 67.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 69-70.

the same nature, yet unique as person, could satisfy Adam's longing for companionship.

Eve, taken from Adam's flesh, was the suitable and true partner for Adam.

Having satisfied humanity's desire for companionship, God endows [him/her] with the authority to transform all created existence into the fullness of its being with God. God's royal creature accomplishes the ultimate truth about the salvation and deification of creation. St. Maximus the Confessor describes how humanity can fulfill the divine commission given to Adam.

Finally, there remaining nothing outside himself but God alone, [the human person] had only to give himself to Him in a complete abandonment of love, and thus return to Him the whole created universe gathered together in his own being. God Himself would then in His turn have given Himself to [the human person], who would then, in virtue of this gift, that is to say by grace, possess all that God possesses by nature.⁶⁹

God commissioned Adam to unite the divisions in creation. Maximus outlines five categories which he argues that Adam, i.e., humanity, must reunite: a) uncreated nature and created nature; b) the intelligible universe and the sensible universe; c) the heavens and the earth of the sensible universe; d) Paradise and the rest of the earth's surface; e) male and female sexes of humankind.⁷⁰ Maximus suggests that Adam is endowed with the ability to unite himself with all of creation, so that creation, too, can become deified. By synthesizing each category in ascending order, the Confessor offers the following solution: E) Sexual separation can be overcome by a loving, committed union between the sexes which brings about new life in cooperation with God. This union, according to Maximus, is a more complete union than a mere physical one; d) The whole earth is

⁶⁹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *De Ambiguis, Patrologia Graeca* XCI, 1308; quoted in Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 110.

⁷⁰ Lossky, 74.

transformed into Paradise through Adam's attachment to God in such a love that he is able to detach himself from everything while still embracing it; c) Gathering together all of the sensible world in himself as body and spirit, Adam is able to transform the division of the sensible universe; b) Adam can assimilate the intelligence of the angels through his spirit and unite the sensible world to the intelligible; a) In giving himself back to God, Adam receives God's divine life by grace. Thus, Adam is able to overcome the separation between the Uncreated God and the created world so that the deification of all humanity and the created world is accomplished.⁷¹

Created in the Image of God

Lossky posits that humanity's "true greatness...is not in [his/her] incontestable kinship with the universe, but in [his/her] participation in divine plenitude, in the mystery within [himself/herself] of the 'image' and the 'likeness.'"⁷² St. Gregory of Nyssa concurs that the greatness of the human person lies "in [his/her] being in the image of the nature of the Creator," "not in [his/her] likeness to the created world."⁷³ Gregory refers to the creation account to support his position: "And God created man in his image; in the divine image He created him; male and female He created him." (Gen 1:27) From this passage, Gregory concludes a duality of nature in the human person: one that is made like to God and the other that is divided.⁷⁴ He writes:

I think that by these words Holy Scripture conveys to us a great and lofty doctrine...

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁷³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XVI, 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 404.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, XVI: 8, 405.

while two natures- the divine and incorporeal nature, and the irrational life of brutes- are separated from each other as extremes, human nature is the mean between them: for in the compound nature of man we may behold a part of each of the natures I have mentioned,-of the Divine, the rational and intelligent element, which does not admit the distinction of male and female; of the irrational, our bodily form and structure, divided into male and female: for each of these elements is certainly to be found in all that partakes of human life...For he says first that ‘God created man in the image of God’...that in such a being there is no male or female” then He adds the peculiar attributes of human nature, ‘male and female created He them.’⁷⁵

Gregory also notes that humankind is made in the image of God to share in all that is good so that [he/she], too, may be filled with all that is goodness.⁷⁶ Hence, the image of God in humankind reveals the fullness of the human vocation to perfection, the state of deification whereby the image shares in the fullness of divine plenitude.⁷⁷ Herein lies the greatness of the human person.

According to Lossky, Gregory believes that human participation in divine goodness manifests the meaning of being created in the image of God. Outside of that, he notes, humanity cannot grasp the depth of its meaning.⁷⁸ In addition, he argues that only a free and personal being is capable of attaining divine union. Gregory writes: “but pre-eminent among all is the fact that we are free from necessity, and not in bondage to any national power, but have decision in our own power as we please...”⁷⁹ As Lossky notes, the Fathers conclude that God created personal beings, free and responsible, in order that He could call them to become by grace that which He is by nature. But God desires this union to come about by a free, deliberate and loving choice. A personal

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, XVI: 9.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, XVI: 10.

⁷⁷ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 119.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁷⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, XVI, 11.

being, that is, one who is made in the image of God, is free and capable of such love.⁸⁰

Lossky notes, “the truth of [the human person]...and [his/her] dignity consists in being able to liberate himself[herself] from his[her] nature, not by consuming it or abandoning it to itself, but by transfiguring it in God.”⁸¹ Since personal beings can, by grace and free choice, participate in divine plenitude, they are the summit of God’s creation. Created beings can love God or they can choose to reject Him. The “divine risk”⁸² paradoxically points to the omnipotent God Who waits for the personal being to make a free choice of love in return.⁸³

Created in the Image of the Triune God

The personalist approach to Christian anthropology that was prevalent among the Eastern Fathers was rooted in the doctrine of the Divine Persons.⁸⁴ To indicate what was common and particular in God, the Fathers relied on the metaphysical terms οὐσία (ousia) and ὑπόστασις (hypostasis) to avoid reducing the human hypostasis “to the level of natures or individual substances.”⁸⁵ With regards to the Trinity of Persons, St. Gregory Nazianzen notes the incomprehensible mystery of the depths of God, which, in his view, “is so unspeakable and [transcends] all words.”⁸⁶ Gregory notes:

But the difference of manifestation, if I may so express myself, or rather of their

⁸⁰ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 71-72.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 73.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

⁸⁴ Vladimir Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 112.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ St. Gregory of Nazianzen, *On the Holy Spirit, Oration 5:8, The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol.VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 320.

mutual relations one to another, has caused the difference of their Names...but the very fact of being Unbegotten or Begotten, or Proceeding, has given the name of Father to the First, of the Son to the Second, and of the Third, Him of whom we are speaking, of the Holy Ghost, that the distinction of the Three Persons may be preserved in the one nature and dignity of the Godhead. For neither is the Son Father, for the Father is One, but He is what the Father is; nor is the Spirit Son because He is of God, For the Only-begotten is One, but he is what the Son is, the Three are One in Godhead, and the One Three in properties...⁸⁷

Based on the teachings of Chalcedon, that Christ is “consubstantial with the Father in divinity, consubstantial with us in humanity,”⁸⁸ Lossky argues that, in humankind, also, there is a distinction between the person or hypostasis and the nature or substance.⁸⁹ As Lossky explains, the incarnation of the divine *Logos* admitted no confusion or mixture of the uncreated and created due to the distinction of the hypostasis of the Son from His divine nature. The hypostasis of the Son assumed human nature in the Virgin Mary at the moment of the Incarnation. Christ’s humanity, “by which He is ‘consubstantial with us,’ never had any other hypostasis than that of the Son of God,”⁹⁰ notes Lossky. However, he adds, Christ remains “perfect in his humanity, truly man.”⁹¹ The hypostasis of the Son became a hypostasis of human nature, He did not transform himself into a human person. Christ’s “enhypostasized”⁹² nature cannot be reduced to the human substance.⁹³ In light of these statements, one may assume that there is a distinction between the hypostasis of the human person and the human as a particular nature. Lossky claims that the

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, Oration 5:9.

⁸⁸ Lossky, 117.

⁸⁹ Lossky, 118.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 117.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 118.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

hypostasis, or human person, is the “superior quality”⁹⁴ that allows for the perfection of one who is created in God’s image.⁹⁵ Distinct from [his/her] own nature, the human person has the power to transcend that nature, while at the same time, allowing this nature to exist.⁹⁶ Thus, as Staniloae notes, the human person is drawn towards the God in whose image [he/she] is made. There is a kinship between the Creator and the created one that longs for communion in a living relationship of love. By virtue of the act of breathing into the human person, God imparts His grace that calls forth a response of union.⁹⁷ Of all the attributes of God that help to form the human person into the likeness of God, Gregory of Nyssa argues that love is the mark that truly transforms [him/her] into His likeness.⁹⁸ The God who is love breathes his Spirit into the soul and establishes a relationship of love. The human person created in the image of God, then, is drawn to share in the love of the Triune God.⁹⁹

Staniloae posits that the inbreathing of God into humankind implants a human soul that extends to [him/her] a life of communion with God.¹⁰⁰ Lossky refers to the divine inbreathing as “the communion with divine energy, inherent in the soul, which is denoted by the term ‘particle of divinity.’”¹⁰¹ To be made in God’s image means to be

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

⁹⁷ Staniloae, 82.

⁹⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* V:2, 391.

⁹⁹ Staniloae, 83.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 84.

¹⁰¹ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 122-123.

made for union with Him, a union that is possible by grace.¹⁰² According to Gregory of Nyssa, “the image is not part of our nature, nor is the grace in any of the things found in that nature...”¹⁰³ God’s image in the human person imprints a “divine seal”¹⁰⁴ on [his/her] human nature that is not confined to one element of [his/her] created being. It embraces all of human nature and reaches its perfection only when that nature “becomes like God’s nature and begins fully to participate in uncreated goodness.”¹⁰⁵ Gregory associates the image of God in humankind with participation in divine goodness:

...[Humankind] was made ‘in the image of God’: for this is the same as to say that He [God] made human nature participate in all good; for if the Deity is the fullness of good, and this is His image, then the image finds its resemblance to the Archetype in being filled with all good.¹⁰⁶

Clearly, the image of God in human creation is the divine gift that designates the greatness of the human person who is called to participate in the plenitude of divine goodness.

As Lossky indicates, the human person possesses a nature that is commonly shared by all persons. He adds that this distinction of nature and person is analogous to the distinction between the single divine nature and three divine Persons in God.¹⁰⁷ Staniloae agrees, noting that the divine image in humankind reflects the trinitarian mystery of communion and *perichoresis*, and is most acutely manifested in interpersonal

¹⁰² Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 122-123.

¹⁰³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, XVI: 17, 406.

¹⁰⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 127.

¹⁰⁵ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, 125.

¹⁰⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, XVI:10, 405.

¹⁰⁷ Lossky, 125.

communion.¹⁰⁸ Evdokimov regards the divine image as “the reproduction of the unutterable Trinitarian mystery...”¹⁰⁹ in the human person. In Staniloae’s view, interpersonal communion is the profound revelation of trinitarian presence:

For it is only from the love between the divine Persons that the force of our own interpersonal love radiates. Interpersonal communion is an image of the Trinitarian communion and a participation in it. Hence, the divine image in the human person is an image of the Trinity and reveals itself in human communion.¹¹⁰

The Book of Genesis contains two references to the communitarian character of the human person made in the image of God: 1) “Let us make [humankind] in our image, after our likeness.” (Gen 1:26) This passage reveals the communitarian nature of God. Created as a couple, humankind is a reflection of God’s nature. 2) “So God created man in his own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.” (Gen 1:27)¹¹¹ Just as in God the one nature expresses itself in the diversity of persons, so, too, in the human person created in his image, one discovers that communion is achieved in the diversity of love because it “subsists in many hypostases.”¹¹² Thus, sharing in a common nature, humanity is drawn toward an eternal communion with God and with all other human persons.¹¹³

Staniloae posits that human participation in divine trinitarian love generates true personhood and perfection of the nature common to all human beings.¹¹⁴ Ware concurs,

¹⁰⁸ Staniloae, 94.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 95.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 97.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 97.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 100.

adding that the human person was created for union with God, who is “the innermost center of [his/her] being...the determining element in our humanity...”¹¹⁵ Participation in genuine communion with other human persons enables human nature to exist in a real way and for humanity to realize the need for communion with the Triune God.¹¹⁶ Ware argues that the human person is made in the trinitarian image:¹¹⁷

Just as the three divine Persons live in and for each other, so [humanity]-being made in the Trinitarian image-becomes real persons by seeing the world through other’s eyes, by making others’ joys and sorrows [their] own...[because] each in uniqueness is created for communion with others.¹¹⁸

The image of God in humanity is a trinitarian image, one that presupposes mutual sharing and relationship. Created in that image, humanity is stamped with a propensity for union that authenticates [his/her] personhood and perfects [his/her] nature.

The Human Person as Image of the Image

As Lossky indicates, patristic thought developed the theme of the image of God in a twofold manner: “the image as the foundation of a particular relationship of [humanity] to God,” and “the image as the principle of God’s self manifestation.”¹¹⁹ This section will explore the theme of Christ as the Image of the invisible God and the human person as the image of the Image of God.

The doctrine of the image of God is permeated with Pauline theology. According to Nellas, Paul’s teaching was based on a liturgical hymn of the early Christian

¹¹⁵ Kallistos Ware, *The Orthodox Way* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1996), 67.

¹¹⁶ Staniloae, 101.

¹¹⁷ Ware, 67.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹¹⁹ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 126.

community.¹²⁰ The hymn begins with the familiar Pauline confession: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation...” (Col 1:15)¹²¹ Nellas argues that the entire hymn serves to emphasize “the christological dimension of Paul’s anthropology.”¹²² St. Paul notes that humankind is the image of the Image of God: “Just as we have born the image of the earthly one, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly one.” (1 Cor. 15:49)¹²³ Paul adds that the human person is the “very imprint of [God’s] being.” (Hebrews 1:3) St. John Chrysostom posits that Christ is “the Express Image”¹²⁴ of God and that the human person is the image who resembles God as a created one who has dominion over the earth in the same fashion that God has dominion over heaven and earth. However, Chrysostom points out that only Christ is the “Express Image” and “Form of God.”¹²⁵ He also notes that Christ is, for the human person, “that ‘likeness’ ...after which [he/she] is.”¹²⁶ Chrysostom finds the true meaning of “after the image of Him that created him”¹²⁷ to be realized in a life fashioned after Christ:

But Christ...is all and in all...Christ will be all things to you, both rank and descent, ‘and Himself’ in you all...that ye all are become one Christ, being His body.¹²⁸

¹²⁰ Nellas, 23.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² *Ibid.*, 24.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Hebrews* II:2, *The Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XIV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 371.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 372.

¹²⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Homilies on Colossians* VIII: 10-11, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. XIII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 295.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

St. Gregory of Nyssa observes the following about the image of God in the human person:

The image is properly an image so long as it fails in none of those attributes which we perceive in the Archetype; but where it falls from its resemblance to the Prototype it ceases in that respect to be an image...¹²⁹

Kavasilas writes, “[Humanity] hastens towards Christ not only on account of His divinity, which is the goal of all things, but also because of His human nature.”¹³⁰ Kavasilas adds that the Archetype of humankind is “not simply the *Logos* but the incarnate *Logos*.”¹³¹ In Him all humanity finds the fulfillment of what human nature must become. St. Paul refers all of creation to Christ as its beginning and its end.

[Christ]...is the firstborn of all creation
 For in him were created all things in heaven and on earth,
 The visible and the invisible,
 Whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers;
 All things were created through him and for him.
 He is before all things,
 And in him all things hold together. He is the head of the body, the Church.
 He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead,
 That in all things He himself might be preeminent.
 For in him all the fullness was pleased to dwell,
 And through him to reconcile all things for him,
 Making peace by the blood of his cross
 [through him], whether those on earth or those in heaven. (Col. 1:15-20)

St. Paul’s words to the Colossians are a hymn to the fullness of the divinity and the humanity of Christ. He glorifies Him as the *Logos* of God and the Archetype of humanity whose death on a cross brings life to all creation.

¹²⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XI:3, 396.

¹³⁰ Nicolas Kavasilas, *The Life in Christ* 6, *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 680A; quoted in Nellas, 35.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

According to Nellas, God created humankind in the divine image so that [he/she] might grow in the likeness of Christ, the Image of the Invisible God. Thus, in conformity to Christ [he/she] might be manifested as God's image.¹³² Having perfected [himself/herself] in Christ, the human person achieves the authentic personhood that leads to *theosis*. According to Maximus,

This is the great hidden mystery. This is the blessed end for which all things were created. This is the preordained divine goal of the origin of beings, which we define as the preordained end for the sake of which all things exist, although this end itself depends on nothing. It was with a view to this end [Christ, the hypostatic union of divine and human nature] that God brought forth the essence of all beings.¹³³

God created the human person in His divine image so that [he/she] might raise [himself/herself] to the Image of the Invisible One. Being created in the image of God is the divine gift that predisposes the human person to authenticity, as [he/she] “finds in the Archetype [his/her] true ontological meaning.”¹³⁴ The Incarnate Christ reveals in His Person the perfection of the love of God “hidden from the ages and from generations”(Col 1:26)¹³⁵ and prepares humankind to attain divine likeness. The Incarnate mystery fulfills God's eternal plan by drawing all creation to Himself in loving communion. In this way, Christ effects the deification of humanity and transforms them into a new creation, into an image of Himself.

Even before sin entered the world through Adam, humanity was in need of the Archetype, the Incarnate *Logos* of God, to attain deification. Adam failed to prepare

¹³² *Ibid.* 36-37.

¹³³ Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassios: On Various Questions* 60, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 621A; quoted in Nellas, 36.

¹³⁴ Nellas, 37.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

humanity to receive the true Image, thus creating the need for its salvation, redemption and deification.¹³⁶ In the Creed, the faithful confess a dual purpose for Christ's coming into the world. Christ came down from heaven "for us [men/women] *and* for our salvation."¹³⁷ Christ, The Image of God, comes for humanity. Through the Incarnation, Christ unites Himself to human nature so that humankind might be deified. Christ is the One "for whom all things were created." (Col 1:16) He also comes to save fallen humankind. Christ, the Redeemer is the One "who reconciles all things" (Col 1:20) by his passion, death, resurrection, ascension and glorification. In Him "all things hold together" (Col 1:17) and humanity's vocation to *theosis* is realized.

The Fall

Eastern and Western Christian understandings of the created state of the human person have led to differing approaches to the theological development of fallen humanity. According to Fairbairn's model, Western soteriology views the fall of humanity as an act "which produced a condition in which the fellowship of God was lost altogether and people's relationships with each other and with the natural world were disrupted."¹³⁸ Fairbairn argues that the approach of the West assumes that humanity's created condition was already perfected.¹³⁹ In Western thought, the Fall introduces another event in the history of human salvation. The Eastern model, on the other hand, does not warrant a separate act for the sin of the first ancestors. Viewed more as a

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 35-39.

¹³⁷ Nicene Creed, Daughters of St. Paul, *The Vatican II Sunday Missal* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1974), 596.

¹³⁸ Fairbairn, 76.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

turning away from the original vocation to *theosis*, the fall of humanity is not regarded as causing a condition in the human person that is significantly different from the created state.¹⁴⁰ In Eastern thought, the original state of humankind was not as significant as the journey towards deification, a journey leading to God.¹⁴¹ A close examination of the Eastern approach to the Fall will support Fairbairn's theory that the Eastern vision of the drama of salvation is the elevation of humanity to a completely new level of blessedness and not a restoration to the original created condition.¹⁴²

From Innocence to Corruption

Created in the divine image, the human person enjoyed a natural propensity toward communion with God and all of His created existence. In Staniloae's view, there was no distinction between the natural and supernatural levels of reality in the innocence of this state. All worked together in a singular order. Humans were capable of perceiving God's gifts to them in creation. They dialogued with God as He addressed them and walked with them in the Garden. The world was the medium of dialogue with God and the human person possessed a propensity for immortality.¹⁴³ Communion with God and with one another was a natural condition of the first ancestors.

Created free and personal beings by God, humans were capable of accepting or rejecting His call to union with Him. As Lossky observes, being created in God's image does not necessarily imply that the original state of humankind was one of perfection, nor

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 76.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 73.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁴³ Staniloae, 103-105.

does it imply that deification was realized from the moment of creation. A perfect nature would have no reason to choose for or against God since it would naturally know what is good. The perfection of human nature was beyond human capacity and rested in the realm of God's grace.¹⁴⁴ He notes:

To arrive at this end the concurrence of two wills is necessary; on the one side there is the divine and deifying will granting grace through the presence of the Holy Spirit in the human person; on the other side there is the human will which submits to the will of God in receiving grace and making it its own, and allowing it to penetrate all its nature.¹⁴⁵

Perfection of human nature, therefore, is dependent upon God's grace acting on human nature as well as the human will that is created free to accept or reject it.

When God created the human person, He provided [him/her] with the gifts necessary for perfection and deification. Among these fruits of the state of innocence, humanity possessed the capacity for immortality,¹⁴⁶ enjoyed a relationship of intimacy with God, and experienced a purity of soul¹⁴⁷ that promised incorruptibility and impassibility. The Fathers considered the state of sinlessness as the condition that would strengthen the human person spiritually so that by the practice of virtue and communion with God, incorruptibility and immortality might become assimilated qualities of their person.¹⁴⁸ As Gross indicates, St. Cyril of Alexandria identifies humanity's capacity for

¹⁴⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 125-126.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.* 126-127.

¹⁴⁶ Staniloae, 105.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁴⁸ Staniloae, 108.

“incorruptibility and indestructibility”¹⁴⁹ as the greatest of all likenesses to God. He observes that the presence of the Holy Spirit in the human person enables [him/her] to share in the incorruptible, divine nature of God.¹⁵⁰ St. Basil notes that Adam’s love for God delighted him as he enjoyed “the delights of Paradise,”¹⁵¹ the sound of the “divine voice”¹⁵² and received “divine benefits.”¹⁵³ Clement of Alexandria submits that the status of the image of God in Adam endowed him with “immortality and...a happy life in Paradise.”¹⁵⁴ The state of innocence allowed the human person to share a relationship of intimacy with God. St. John Chrysostom writes:

He[She] enjoyed an intimate company with God and took delight in the confidence in Him. And while the angels trembled, while the Cherubim and Seraphim did not even dare to look Him in the face, he conversed with God as a friend with his friend.¹⁵⁵

St. Athanasius describes the innocence as a “purity of soul...to reflect God.”¹⁵⁶

...as the first of [humans] created, the one who was named Adam in Hebrew, is described in the Holy Scriptures as having at the beginning had his mind to God-ward in a freedom unembarrassed by shame, and as associating with the holy ones in that contemplation of things perceived by the mind which he enjoyed in the

¹⁴⁹ St. Cyril of Alexandria, *Commentary on John* 14:20 (74:277a-d); quoted in Gross, 221.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵¹ Basil of Caesarea, *Homily* 9:7 (31:344c); quoted in Gross, 191.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Clement of Alexandria, *Protepticus [Exhortation to the Greeks]* 11 (8:228C); quoted in Gross, 133.

¹⁵⁵ St. John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Genesim* 16:5 (53:132); quoted in Gross, 201.

¹⁵⁶ St. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 2:4, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 5.

place where he was...a garden.¹⁵⁷

Maximus adds that incorruptibility [α'φθαρσία] and impassibility [α'πα'θεια] are “gracious gifts”¹⁵⁸ without which deification cannot be achieved.¹⁵⁹ All the means necessary for deification were inscribed in the human person at [his/her] creation.

Privileged to share in a personal relationship with God, the human person enjoyed a state of innocence and a purity of soul that rendered [him/her] eligible for the gifts of incorruptibility and immortality.

Loss of Innocence

In Staniloae's view, the primordial state of innocence describes the condition of the first human beings without the experience of sin. He cautions, however, that the state of innocence does not mean to imply that humankind had the capacity to drive away temptations.¹⁶⁰ Staniloae believes that consistent exercise of the good would have overcome the temptations and passions that eventually overcame the human spirit.¹⁶¹ But in the face of temptation, the first ancestors renounced their freedom, the very basis of their greatness as beings created in the divine image, and succumbed to sin, death and corruption.¹⁶² Staniloae supports his argument with the words of St. Athanasius who writes:

But [humanity], having rejected things eternal, and, by counsel of the devil, turned to

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁸ Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium Prologus* 90:257d-260a; quoted in Gross, 250.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Staniloae, 104.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 105.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 107-109.

the things of corruption, became the cause of their own corruption in death, being by nature corruptible, but destined by the grace following from partaking of the Word, to have escaped their natural state, had they remained good.¹⁶³

Humankind forfeited the potential for incorruptibility and immortality by the free choice of the human will. Had they not relinquished their natural propensity toward the good and surrendered to the power of the temptations and passions that dissolved their intimacy with God, their human nature would have remained capable of immortality and incorruptibility. Athanasius continues:

For [humanity] is by nature mortal, inasmuch as [they] are made out of what is not; but by reason of [their] likeness to Him that is (and if [they] still preserved this likeness by keeping Him in [their] knowledge) [they] would stay [their] natural corruption, and remain incorrupt; as Wisdom says: ‘The taking heed to His laws is the assurance of immortality;’ but being incorrupt, [they] would live henceforth as God.¹⁶⁴

Had the human person continued to grow in the knowledge of God and revel in His gaze, sin could have been averted. However, the deliberate choice to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil ended the initial condition of the human person at creation, “a state halfway between obedience and disobedience”¹⁶⁵ and robbed them of their innocence.

Staniloae observes that the human person was free to grow in love of God by [his/her] own efforts. The innocence of the primordial state proves that God created [him/her] as intrinsically good, endowing [him/her] with all means necessary for union with Him. St. Basil recognizes that the primordial state of the human person is also

¹⁶³ St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 5:1, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 38.

¹⁶⁴ St. Athanasius, *De Incarnatione Verbi Dei* 5:6, 38.

¹⁶⁵ Staniloae, 164.

evidence that God did not create the human person as intrinsically evil. Evil, he argues, is the deliberate choice of the man and the woman.¹⁶⁶ God granted them freedom at creation: “You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die.” (Gen 2:16-17) God bade the man and woman to exercise their gift of freedom by making deliberate efforts toward the good in their vocation to grow in union with Him. The choice to oppose God’s ordinance in an act of disobedience marks the beginning of human enslavement to self and the loss of the innocence of the primordial state.¹⁶⁷

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

If evil lurks under the appearance of good, how were the man and the woman to recognize what was good and what was evil? God granted freedom to the man and woman to eat of any tree in the garden with one exception, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. With the consumption of its fruit, death was immanent. What constitutes the knowledge of good and evil? Consider the following text from St. Maximus the Confessor whose discourse highlights the significance of the forbidden tree:

Perhaps the creation of visible things was called the tree of the knowledge of good and evil because it has both spiritual reasons that nourish the mind and a natural power that charms the senses and yet perverts the mind. Therefore, when spiritually contemplated, it offers the knowledge of the good, while when received bodily it offers the knowledge of evil. For to those who partake of it in the body, it becomes a teacher of the passions, leading them to forget about divine things. Maybe that is why God had forbidden [the human person] the knowledge of good and evil, postponing for awhile the partaking of it so that first of all, as was right-[the human person] knowing

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.

[his/her] own cause by communing with it in grace, and through this communion, changing the immortality given [him/her] by grace into freedom from passions and unchangeability, like one already becomes a god through deification- [he/she] together with God, should gaze harmlessly and fearlessly on God's creatures and receive knowledge of them as God, not as [human], possessing by grace and wisdom the same understanding of things as God, thanks to the transfiguring of the mind and senses through deification.¹⁶⁸

Staniloae proposes that the two trees in Eden represent the same world. To the mind led by the spirit, the tree of life is the world that nurtures the created state of the human person keeping [his/her] eyes fixed on God in a relationship of love. To the mind led by the senses, the world is the tree of knowledge of good and evil alienating the human person from God. The consequences of this estrangement result in the loss of the state of innocence.¹⁶⁹ Gregory of Nyssa cautions that the sensible aspects of the world would be a source of evil for persons who grasped them solely through the senses.¹⁷⁰

The tree, then, from which comes this fruit of mixed knowledge, is among those things which are forbidden; and that fruit is combined of opposite qualities, which has the serpent to commend it. It may be for this reason, that evil is not exposed in its nakedness, itself appearing in its own proper nature--for wickedness would surely fail of its effect were it not decked with some fair colour to entice it to the desire of him[her] whom it deceives-but now the nature of evil is in a manner mixed, keeping destruction like some snare concealed in its depths, and displaying some phantom of good in the deceitfulness of its exterior.¹⁷¹

Gregory's description of evil leads Staniloae to conclude that evil is perverse and ambiguous. The tempter presents evil as a good, thus giving it grounds upon which to

¹⁶⁸ St. Maximus the Confessor, *To Thalassiu: On Various Questions, Introduction*, *Patrologia Graeca* 90.257C-260A; quoted in Staniloae, 163.

¹⁶⁹ Staniloae, 166-167.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 167.

¹⁷¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XX:2, 410.

stand, all the while deceiving the one tempted. The initial sweetness of evil ultimately has deadly results.¹⁷² Evil's deceptive nature is described by Gregory:

...there is a certain identity of name between that which is and that which appears to be 'good,'—for this reason that desire which arises towards what is evil, as though towards good, is called by Scripture 'the knowledge of good and evil,'...expressing a certain mixed disposition. It speaks of the fruit of the forbidden tree not as a thing absolutely evil (because it is decked with good), nor as a thing purely good (because evil is latent in it), but as compounded of both, and declares that the tasting of it brings to death those who touch it.¹⁷³

Staniloae concludes that for Gregory, the tree of knowledge represented those elements of the world that pertain to the senses.¹⁷⁴ The evil element lies hidden under the appearance of a good. A clear example of Gregory's theory of the deceptive nature of evil is found in the Scriptural account of the temptation of Eve: "The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it: and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it." (Gen 3:6) According to the Genesis account, Eve's perception was clouded in sensibilities and passions: food for eating, pleasing to behold, and empowering to the mind. The knowledge that Adam and Eve acquired in the eating of the fruit of the tree was the knowledge of their own capacity for evil and the future struggle that awaited them against evil.¹⁷⁵ Gregory describes the mortal consequences to humanity as a result of Adam and Eve's choice to take from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

[It was] that eating which became the mother of death to [humankind]...[because] like the evil nature of poisons that are prepared with honey, it appears to be good in so far

¹⁷² Staniloae, 168-169.

¹⁷³ Gregory of Nyssa, XX:3, 410.

¹⁷⁴ Staniloae, 167-168.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 170,

as it affects the senses with sweetness: but in so far as it destroys him[her] who touches it, it is the worst of all evil.¹⁷⁶

Adam and Eve came to know the bitterness of estrangement from God after their disobedience. The world, which had been for them their means of dialogue with their Creator, had turned into a world that revealed to them their bodily passions and selfish pride. The transparency of the world that united them to God and pointed to the meaning of all things was lost. The world became for them an object to satisfy the needs of the body.¹⁷⁷

To complement and complete Gregory's insights on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, Staniloae offers Basil's more positive theory that God "reduces those evil passions [of the soul] to order, and brings them to a better state so that they may cease to be evil and may adopt the nature of good."¹⁷⁸ He notes that while Adam was guilty of an act of disobedience, he was eventually to realize his own nakedness and shame because of it. Although Adam and Eve's disobedience introduced evil to the world, the outcome of repentance is to be considered a good. Hence, Staniloae concludes from Basil's approach to the sin of Adam and Eve that God's grace enables fallen humanity to learn repentance, to ward off temptations, and to battle against Satan.¹⁷⁹ While Gregory's thought links evil with death, Basil introduces another consequence of evil; a movement beyond death to repentance and conversion.

¹⁷⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XX:4.

¹⁷⁷ Staniloae, 171.

¹⁷⁸ Basil of Caesarea, *Prolegomena*, Homily IX, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VIII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), lviii.

¹⁷⁹ Staniloae, 169-170.

Evil

According to Lossky's interpretation of the Eastern Fathers, evil is "not a nature..., but a condition..."¹⁸⁰ Evil describes the condition of the will of the nature it lives on.¹⁸¹ Evil made its way into the world through the will of the human person.¹⁸² Lossky adds that evil is "the state in which one finds the nature of those personal beings who have turned from God."¹⁸³ Lossky locates the origin of evil in the rebellion of Lucifer, the created angel. Lucifer's desire for self-deification was the root of his sin. Lossky recounts the irony of Lucifer's rebellion, "He who was first called to deification by grace wished to be God by himself."¹⁸⁴ Disguised as the serpent in the Garden, Lucifer's thirst to make himself a god is manifested in the initial encounter with the first humans. Genesis recounts his words to Adam and Eve, "you will be like gods..." (Gen 3:5) Filled with pride and hatred of God's grace, he was imbued with a spirit of revolt that led to his expulsion from the heavens into the earthly world. Here he seeks to undermine the divine plan of God, wrecking destruction and death on all of creation.¹⁸⁵ Negating God, his creation and all being, the fallen angels have become "spirits of darkness"¹⁸⁶ who strive to contaminate the human will and destroy creation.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁰ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 128.

¹⁸¹ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 80.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 80.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 81.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 81-82.

¹⁸⁶ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 129.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

Florovsky refers to the violent force and destructive power of evil as a “strange causality that rivals that of the Creator as if it came from a destroyer of the world.”¹⁸⁸ He is quick to add, however that only God possesses true power. Florovsky also argues that God is “engaged in a struggle with the powers of darkness.”¹⁸⁹ Evil, he notes, is a violent force and a real danger that diminishes the presence of the good.¹⁹⁰ Just as evil was the result of the liberty of the will of the fallen angels, so it is with humanity. Evil entered the world through Adam’s will.¹⁹¹

In Maximian language, Adam and Eve’s failure to fulfill their natural inclination towards God is considered evil.¹⁹² Unable to detach themselves from the object that would sever their union with God, they became a slave to their senses and to the created world. According to Lossky, having turned away from God and the natural inclination toward goodness, Adam and Eve barred the entrance of grace that was to enter the world through them.¹⁹³ St. Athanasius claims that when Adam and Eve turned their minds from God, sin and evil entered the world. He writes:

But [humans], making light of better things, and holding back from apprehending them, began to seek in preference things nearer to themselves. But nearer to themselves were the body and its senses; so that while removing their mind from the things perceived by thought, they began to regard themselves; and so doing, and holding to the body and the other things of sense, and deceived as it were in their own surroundings, they fell into lust of themselves, preferring what was their own to the contemplation of what belonged to God.¹⁹⁴

¹⁸⁸ Florovsky, 82.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 132.

¹⁹² Thunberg, 165.

¹⁹³ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 131-132.

¹⁹⁴ St. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 3:1-2, 5.

Adam and Eve's preference of the material world over the contemplation of God entangled them in the sensible world and obstructed their vision of the things of God. Thus, the way was opened for evil to enter the world through their will, destroying the possibility of fulfilling the vocation to deification. Adam and Eve's free and deliberate choice to turn away from God's command was an act contrary to humanity's natural inclination towards union with Him.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, abuse of human freedom introduced death into the created world as a consequence of sin. As Lossky posits, "Sin has been introduced where grace should reign, and instead of the divine plenitude, a gaping abyss has opened in God's creation, the gates of hell opened by the free will of [humankind]."¹⁹⁶ The sin that deters the reception of God's grace results in death and hurls humankind into an unnatural state.¹⁹⁷

In Florovsky's view, Athanasius claims that the Fall is the result of humanity loving itself more than God, "the infidelity of love, the insane separation from the Only One who is worthy of affection and love."¹⁹⁸ Humanity has fallen away from its vocation to deification by separating themselves from their relationship with God. This is core to Eastern patristic thought. Adam and Eve's disobedience was a deliberate choice away from their relationship with God. Athanasius adds:

For [humankind] also, as long as [they] kept [their] mind to God, and the contemplation of God, turned away from the contemplation of the body. But when, by counsel of the serpent, [they] departed from the consideration of God, and began

¹⁹⁵ Lossky, 131-132.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹⁹⁸ Florovsky, 85-86.

to regard [themselves], then they not only fell to bodily lust, but knew that they were naked, and knowing, were ashamed. But they knew that they were naked, not so much of clothing as that they were become stripped of the contemplation of divine things, and had transferred their understanding to the contraries. For having departed from the consideration of the one and the true, namely, God, and from desire of Him, they had thenceforward embarked in diverse lusts and in those of the several bodily senses...¹⁹⁹

For Adam and Eve, theirs was the choice between God and themselves. In choosing themselves, they rejected the paternal love of God and a relationship with Him who longs for a loving, filial response from His created, personal beings.

In spite of the disintegration that evil causes, created beings, including the fallen angels, never cease to be persons by virtue of having been created in the image of God. Inherently evil acts lead to a de-personalization of humankind that separates them from God. As a consequence, the personal character of man and woman wages a war with the impersonal character, giving rise to the passions.²⁰⁰ Herein lies the paradox of evil that splits human existence in two. Human persons become enslaved by the influences of their passions and forfeit their freedom and personal identity.²⁰¹ Florovsky notes, “Evil in [humankind] is an ignorance [αγνοια] and an insensibility, the blindness of reason and the hardness of heart.”²⁰² Encased in selfishness and isolation, the human person is in need of God’s grace to be freed from its forces. But, as Florovsky observes, the divine

¹⁹⁹ St. Athanasius, *Contra Gentes* 3:3-4, 5.

²⁰⁰ Florovsky, 87.

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 90.

image is preserved, although it is obscured by sin. He concludes that humanity's "ontological"²⁰³ capacity for God's grace is present even in the depths of evil.²⁰⁴

Evil, then, describes the condition of the will of the human person who has turned away from God. As Lossky states, evil has a parasitic character that depends on human nature in order to manifest itself.²⁰⁵ Consequently, evil survives in the free will of human persons who accept to be dominated by its influence. Adam and Eve, in their deliberate choice to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, severed human nature from God and hurled it into an unnatural condition, denied of God's grace. Without grace humanity is unable to achieve authentic human nature.²⁰⁶ Therefore, humanity is cast into chaos and death, unable to fulfill their vocation and destiny of *theosis*.²⁰⁷

The Garments of Skin

After the Fall, humanity found itself in an unnatural condition, longing for what was natural. As Nellas observes, St. Gregory of Nyssa referred to this "postlapsarian state"²⁰⁸ as "the garments of skin,"²⁰⁹ a teaching which finds its source in the Scriptural text,²¹⁰ "For the man and his wife the Lord God made leather garments, with which He clothed them." (Gen 3:21) Nellas observes that patristic anthropological thought is based on the theological implications of two fundamental premises: humanity created "in the

²⁰³ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 80.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 80-83.

²⁰⁷ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 133.

²⁰⁸ Nellas, 44.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

image” of God and the post-lapsarian condition of humanity described by “the garments of skin.”²¹¹ Nellas argues that humanity is able to survive the unnatural condition of the Fall, and to realize the fullness of being created in the divine image because of the covering of skins provided after the Fall.²¹² However limited in its development, in the view of the Fathers, the teaching of the “garments of skin” reveals that humankind put on mortality after the Fall.²¹³ Life proper to their being was not present in the same manner after the Fall because the natural presence of grace had ceased to flow within them. For humanity separated from God, death had become a reality, and life’s meaning was determined by survival.²¹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa describes how the nature created for immortality acquired its mortality:

For after...the earliest of [humankind] were brought into contact with what was forbidden, and thereby stripped naked of that primal blessed condition, the Lord clothed these, his first-formed creatures, with coats of skins.²¹⁵

The nature created for immortality had become a non-rational nature, afflicted with mortality and deprived of its tendencies toward reason and harmony. Gregory likens the non-rational nature of the human person to animal nature:

For it is not allowable to ascribe the first beginnings of our constitutional liability to passion to that human nature which was fashioned in the Divine likeness; but as brute life first entered into the world, and [humankind]...took something of their nature... these attributes...with which brute life was armed for self-preservation, when transferred to human life, became passions...²¹⁶

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 46.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46-47.

²¹⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VIII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 482.

²¹⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XVIII:2, 407-408.

Falling from the natural state of being created in the divine image, the human person acquired animal-like tendencies such as anger, love of pleasure, cowardice, fear, and greed.²¹⁷ Gregory acknowledges that “all the infusions of the life of the brute into our nature were not in us before our humanity descended through the touch of evil into passions...”²¹⁸ Maximus, who relied on Gregory’s works, argues that the cardinal passions, i.e., “desire, lust, fear and grief”²¹⁹ were not present within the human person at creation but were “introduced into the irrational part of [his/her] soul after the Fall.”²²⁰ Maximus posits that the human person was created with the capacity for a spiritual pleasure, which, in its misdirected use towards the sensible world, became unnatural, irrational lust.²²¹ The “garments of skin” represent how the misuse of the material world introduced humankind into the non-rational nature of the animals.

Nellas posits that humanity was now associated with “constant movement and change,”²²² dissatisfaction, and irrationality which are representative marks of the material world. Such conditions fail to satisfy the state of the unnatural condition of the human person.²²³ Gregory adds that the unnatural condition of humanity destroyed the

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, XVIII:2, 408.

²¹⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 464.

²¹⁹ Thunberg, 161.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 161-162

²²² Nellas, 51.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 52.

“godly beauty of the soul...and the glory”²²⁴ of being created in the divine image.²²⁵ He argues that humanity’s natural state had become “disfigured with the ugliness of sin.”²²⁶ Life as Adam and Eve once knew it had changed after the Fall. According to Nellas, Adam and Eve’s experience of life, formerly filled with God’s grace, had changed to mere survival until death.²²⁷ Gregory describes the condition of humankind after the Fall:

This thing so great and precious, as the Scripture calls [him/her], this being [humankind], has fallen from [its] proud birthright. As those who have slipped and fallen heavily into mud, and have all their features so besmeared with it, that their nearest friends do not recognize them, so this creature has fallen into the mire of sin and ...has clothed [himself/herself] instead with a perishable and foul resemblance to something else.²²⁸

According to Gregory, humanity’s created condition in the divine image was a glorious state, truly reflective of the resplendent beauty of God. The evil of sin corrupted and decayed their nature, destroying its likeness to the Creator. Having acted non-rationally, humanity now shares a nature in common with animal nature.²²⁹ Gregory argues that the covering of skin “was added to [humankind] as a result of [his/her] lustful sense experience of the world around [him/her],”²³⁰ and represents that which humanity shares in common with animals.²³¹ Humankind is thus associated with the irrationality of animal nature, including bodily death. Lossky observes that if humankind were left to the

²²⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity XII, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 357.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*

²²⁶ *Ibid.*

²²⁷ Nellas, 47.

²²⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity XII, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 357.

²²⁹ Nellas, 49.

²³⁰ Thunberg, 160.

²³¹ *Ibid.*

disorder of this irrational state, it would be eternal. Therefore, the “garments of skin” span the distance between humanity and God that sin and death have provoked. God’s eternal plan that humanity and all creation share in His divine life through deification does not change.²³² To heal humanity’s sinfulness, God wrapped them in the same capacity for immortality as the animals.

For a coat is something external put on us, lending itself to the body for a time, but not indigenous to its nature. This liability to death, then, taken from the brute creation, was provisionally made to envelope the nature created for immortality.²³³

Gregory demonstrates the theological connection between the divine image and the covering of skin in the above passage. God intervenes to reverse the tragic consequences of humanity fallen into sin and eternal death. The “garments” enable humankind to avoid eternal corruption and mortality by preparing the way for human redemption and ultimate union with God.²³⁴

Like Gregory of Nyssa, Nellas observes that the “garments of skin,” are a means by which God provides for humanity’s realization of their intended deification²³⁵ “Divine benevolence,”²³⁶ writes Gregory, will see to it that the “earthly envelopment,”²³⁷ i.e., the “garment of skins,” will be removed so that “the souls buried beauty will appear again.”²³⁸ God’s work will bestow a gift on humanity that will restore all “that which is

²³² Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 83-84.

²³³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VIII, 483.

²³⁴ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 84.

²³⁵ Nellas, 61.

²³⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* VIII, 482

²³⁷ *Ibid.*

²³⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* XII, 358.

familiar and natural.”²³⁹ God places a certain order at the center of the disarray and disorder that is the mystery of the “garments of skin.” In this fashion, He spares humanity of the total annihilation of evil. Mortality becomes a far better punishment than external banishment. Robed in finitude, the human person is given the opportunity for new life through repentance.²⁴⁰ Although the “garments of skin” obscured the image of God in humanity, according to Nellas, they offered a “remedy and blessing.”²⁴¹ The covering of skins provided the means for the human person to survive in death and return to their “original state of blessedness.”²⁴² By allowing death, God destroys the corruption and sin that imprisons humankind. Communion with God is once again possible because of divine wisdom and compassion.²⁴³

The principle of immortality breathed into human creation makes the man and woman more than the clay of the earth. Satan’s desire that humanity would be dissolved into matter at death, surrendering into the earth “those constituent elements of the world of which it was composed,”²⁴⁴ is thwarted by God’s divine plan. At the resurrection, Christ will transform all humankind at the same time that He transforms the created universe into a “new heaven and a new earth.”²⁴⁵ Gregory offers this explanation:

The Maker of our vessel, now that wickedness has...connected with the body, will dissolve the material which has received the evil, and, remoulding it again by the Resurrection without any admixture of the contrary matter, will recombine the

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁰ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 83.

²⁴¹ Nellas, 63.

²⁴² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* XII, 358.

²⁴³ Nellas, 64-65.

²⁴⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* VIII, 483; quoted in Nellas, 65.

²⁴⁵ Nellas, 66.

elements into the vessel in its original beauty.²⁴⁶

The bodily nature of humanity, corrupted by sin, will disintegrate after physical death so as to shed itself of its capacity for mortality and corruption. Christ's resurrection from physical death restores human nature created in the divine image to its capacity for immortality and incorruptibility it possessed in the pre-lapsarian state. The Incarnation of the Divine *Logos* infuses the entire created order with the possibility of deification. Christ's Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension transforms and deifies all creation, making all things new.

Kavasilas interprets the resurrection of the dead to mean that "all [humankind] will receive ageless bodies and rise incorruptible,"²⁴⁷ even those who have not been washed in Baptism. But, he notes, restoration of human nature at the resurrection is available to those who have lovingly desired the Kingdom, the vision of God, and union with Him.²⁴⁸ Kavasilas indicates the implications for humanity being created in God's image, i.e., for eternal life. He states, "While all will live in immortality, it is not all who will live in blessedness."²⁴⁹ Eternal existence is a gift given to all human persons. It is innate to human nature and given to all, even if they are not desired. One cannot escape them. It is to those who long for God and are faithful to Him that God bestows deification. Simply put, "those who choose the good, seek forgiveness of sins, are

²⁴⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VIII, 483.

²⁴⁷ Kavasilas, 81.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

upright in character, and whose souls are pure and filled with love for God”²⁵⁰ will be embraced in divine plenitude. The eternal life of the Kingdom is reserved for those who entrust their salvation to Christ and are at one with Him. Immortality is bestowed upon all who share in the life of Christ given in Baptism.²⁵¹

God’s plan to save humankind from mortality is powerfully portrayed in the traditional Eastern icon of the Resurrection. Unlike the popular Western image that portrays Christ as rising from the tomb, the Eastern tradition prefers to depict Christ’s descent into the dead. Christ is seen shattering death’s doors and liberating all those who have long awaited his coming.²⁵² Hackel describes the icon of the Resurrection of Christ in the following quote taken from Gregerson:

Christ has conquered hell and He stands victorious on the broken gates of the palace of Hades. Under them in the pit, lie demons deprived of their power. Christ helps Adam and Eve out of the tomb; thus sin is overcome...In the background is the symbol of the cosmos—the triple circle. It’s quiet light falls on the rocky landscape and on all creation. Everything is filled with a new light; Heaven and earth, and all that is under the earth. And everywhere is heard the jubilant cry of Easter: Christ is Risen...²⁵³

The icon draws the faithful into the mystery of Christ who liberates humankind from the powers of sin, redeems fallen creation and reigns victorious over death.

“Cosmological Dimensions of the ‘Garments of Skin’”²⁵⁴

St. Maximus notes that before the Fall, Adam and Eve lived in harmony with the created universe. Their natural state of well-being did not suffer hunger or fatigue. No

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

²⁵² Gregerson, 23.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁴ Nellas, 85-86.

protection for the body was needed, neither shelter nor clothing. Man and woman did not experience shame in their nakedness.²⁵⁵ “Dispassionate by grace”²⁵⁶ before the Fall, the first ancestors were not victims of the fantasies of sensual pleasures.²⁵⁷ Having been created in the image of God, the human person possessed the natural gift of wisdom, and enjoyed dominion over the earth. St. John Chrysostom observes that before his sin, Adam’s work was to meditate on the things of the Kingdom of God:

At the beginning and before his sin, when he was clothed with glory, and conversed freely with God, and dwelt in that place that was full of great blessedness²⁵⁸

But as Nellas indicates, Adam’s transgression caused matter to cease to move towards spirit and veered in the direction of materiality.²⁵⁹ He adds that materiality refers to the condition “in which matter is characterized exclusively by its own elements.”²⁶⁰ Self-enclosed, matter was reduced to corruption and a futility of movement, having lost its ability to develop towards spirit. The Genesis account records the consequences that sin inflicted on the created universe: “Cursed be the ground because of you!...thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you...” (Gen 3:17-18) Consequently, the human person became entangled and entrapped in the “disruption...of creation”²⁶¹ caused by sin. Out

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 87-88.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁵⁸ St. John Chrysostom, *The Gospel of St. Matthew, Homily LXVIII:3, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. X (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 417-418.

²⁵⁹ Nellas, 86.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 85.

of sin flowed insatiable needs of the body and the spirit that were not known in the pre-lapsarian state²⁶² where God filled all human longings and needs.

After the Fall, the man and woman needed to learn and to work. As recorded in Genesis, “In toil shall you eat its [the earth] yield all the days of your life...by the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat.” (Gen 3:17,19) God’s plan intended that the natural gifts given to human persons were to aid them in their vocation to bring all of humanity and the created world back to him.²⁶³ The introduction of sin changed humanity’s God given natural human gifts into human needs in search of satisfaction.

Sin also affected the profound levels of communion that humans knew before the Fall. The meaningful intimacy that Adam and Eve shared with God modeled the deep and natural communion men and women were intended to share among themselves. The personalist character of being made in the divine image inclined the human person to meaningful communion. All this was shattered after the Fall. The natural inclination for communion was overshadowed by a sense of individualism in need of social survival. As a consequence, cities and political life were established to promote a sense of social survival.²⁶⁴

The teaching of the ‘garments of skin’ demonstrates the wisdom and the compassion of God who intervenes in order that humanity might survive the conditions of the Fall.²⁶⁵ Even though the ‘garments of skin’ covered the human person with a

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 87-88.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*, 89.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

materiality and a mortality that was unnatural to [his/her] nature, St. John Chrysostom believes that the garments serve to reveal the wise and loving providence of God. He writes:

Tell me not of [humankind] fallen, degraded and condemned. But if thou wouldest learn what manner of body God formed us with at the first, let us go to Paradise, and survey the [man/woman] that was created at the beginning. For that body was not thus corruptible and mortal; but like as some statue of gold just brought forth from the furnace, that shines splendidly so that frame was free from all corruption. Labour did not trouble it, nor sweat deface it. Cares did not conspire against it; nor sorrows besiege it; nor was there any other affection of that kind to distress it. But when [man/woman] did not bear [their] felicity with moderation, but threw contempt upon their Benefactor, and thought a deceiving demon more worthy of credit than God who cared for [them], and who had raised [them] to honour, and when [they] expected to become [themselves] a god, and conceived thoughts above [their] proper dignity, then indeed it was that God, to humble [them] by decisive acts, made [them] mortal and corruptible;...God made the body subject to much suffering and disease; to instruct [them] by its very nature [they] must never again entertain such a thought... Consider...the wisdom of God in this matter.²⁶⁶

God benevolently embraces humanity with the covering of skins as testimony that even “wounded and corrupt matter,”²⁶⁷ when loved by God, receives new powers.²⁶⁸

With this in mind, Nellas reminds the Church of her responsibility to “honor the image”²⁶⁹ of God in the human person and “the matter which makes up the image.”²⁷⁰ To approach the created order as an end in itself leads to the final destruction of all things.²⁷¹ Schmemmann argues that the world is fallen because it refuses to acknowledge that “the

²⁶⁶ St. John Chrysostom, *Concerning the Statutes, Homily XI:3, Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IX (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 413-414.

²⁶⁷ Nellas, 95.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ Nellas, 95-96.

world is meaningful only when it is the sacrament of God's presence."²⁷² Taken as its own end, the world cut off from God, destroys itself.²⁷³ Serious implications for the world are raised by Nellas. He notes that wars and revolutions, overproduction of the earth and consumerism interrupts and disorients humankind in their movement towards God.²⁷⁴ Taken only for the satisfaction and the pleasure that it offers to human persons, the world ceases to be the "transparent ... window through which [they] [gaze] on God."²⁷⁵ Having been formed out of the elements of the created world, the human person is intrinsically bound to creation in such a manner that [he/she] is responsible for its transformation and deification.

It is important to remember that the world is the means by which humanity communes with divinity. After all, notes Nellas, the sacramental life of the Church is dependent on the earth's matter.²⁷⁶ He also posits that the patristic teaching of the "garments of skin" is useful in achieving union with God and building up the Body of Christ. From this perspective, the 'garments of skin' become a blessing to humanity.²⁷⁷ Ware states:

In separating our body and our soul at death...God is acting like the potter: when the vessel upon his wheel has become marred and twisted, He breaks the clay in pieces so as to fashion it anew.²⁷⁸

²⁷² Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World: Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2002), 16-17.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁴ Nellas, 96.

²⁷⁵ Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 77.

²⁷⁶ Nellas, 100.

²⁷⁷ Nellas, 100.

²⁷⁸ Ware, 78.

The theology of the ‘garments of skin’ teaches that the separation of body and soul at death provides the bodily nature, corrupted by sin, with the possibility to rise anew at the resurrection of the body so that humanity realizes their vocation to *theosis*. Or, as found in the funeral rite of the Eastern tradition:

Of old Thou has created me from nothing and honoured me with Thy divine image:
But when I disobeyed Thy commandment, Thou hast returned me to the earth whence
I was taken. Lead me back again to Thy likeness, refashioning my ancient beauty.²⁷⁹

The resplendent and glorious image of God in humanity is restored by the power of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ. The mystery of the ‘garments of skin’ is resolved in the eternal plan of God and in His divine plenitude. By permitting human persons to undergo a physical death, God transforms human nature in a manner that restores the life of grace and eradicates the perpetual state of sinful existence.²⁸⁰ Physical death puts an end to mortality, corruption and sin so that human nature may be restored as immortal, incorrupt and deified.²⁸¹

Summary

At the root of the Eastern understanding of sin is human failure to respond to the vocation of *theosis*. Although sin remains a serious matter, the Eastern tradition places less emphasis on the notion of disobedience and consequent guilt than the West, which tends to categorize sinfulness in legal terms. Sin is viewed not so much as an act of disobedience as it is understood “in terms of life and relationship.”²⁸² In this sense,

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ Chrestou, 27-28.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁸² Fairbairn, 75.

Eastern thought does not regard the Fall as hurling humanity into “a substantially new condition.”²⁸³ Rather, sin’s consequences imposed an “infinite distance between the created and uncreated, the natural separation of [humankind] from God which ought to have been overcome by deification...”²⁸⁴ Instead, “an impassable abyss”²⁸⁵ opposed sin and physical death, making deification impossible. All persons by birth would inherit the nature corrupted by Adam and Eve, which would set in motion a disorder in the entire created world in need of re-creation.²⁸⁶ The sin of the first ancestors is the result of their refusal to receive the created world as “the sacrament of communion with God.”²⁸⁷ Viewing the world as material, they failed to transform it into a means of communion with God.²⁸⁸ To restore humanity’s capacity for union with Him and their fulfillment as deified, God provides for the renewal and redemption of fallen creation. Christ, the New Adam, unites divinity to humanity so that humanity is once again on the path to deification. The Son of God takes on human flesh, deifies it, and by His death, resurrection and ascension, He prepares the way for the final elevation of all creation.

Elevation: More Than Redemption

The term “elevation,”²⁸⁹ the second and final act of the Eastern model, indicates the influence that the doctrine of *theosis* exerts on Eastern soteriology. In the Western model, the third and final act of salvation, ‘redemption’ describes “God’s actions to

²⁸³ Fairbairn, 74.

²⁸⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 135.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Chrestou, 28-30.

²⁸⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 18.

²⁸⁸ Schmemmann, 18.

²⁸⁹ Fairbairn, 76.

redeem, to save and to restore humanity to a state resembling the original created condition.”²⁹⁰ This schema demonstrates that salvation is “a restoration to the original beatitude, the state that had been lost with the Fall.”²⁹¹ The Eastern model displays a strikingly different design in its approach to soteriology. It is an “elevation to a new level of beatitude, something never before experienced by humanity.”²⁹² In this act, the Eastern vision of *theosis* finds fulfillment. Humanity is raised to a level of total union with God as partakers in divine life.²⁹³

The final section of this chapter examines the organic connection between *theosis* and the doctrine of salvation. In Eastern Christian thought, salvation is not strictly limited to the saving work of the Person of Jesus Christ on the Cross, but includes the realization of *theosis* as given in the Incarnation: the transfiguration of the entire created cosmos through the economy of the Son and the economy of the Holy Spirit. A summary of Orthodox soteriology as proposed by Aghioroussis²⁹⁴ will serve as a framework from which to place in dialogue the voices of Lossky, Ware, Schmemmann, Meyendorff and Aghioroussis on this matter.

From Descent to Ascent

According to Kavalas, the Fall of Adam and Eve caused a triple division between God and humanity.²⁹⁵ Sin corrupted human nature and inflicted death. Sin

²⁹⁰ Fairbairn, 77.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² *Ibid.*, 76-77.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 76.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

²⁹⁵ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 136.

prevented Adam from fulfilling his vocation to ascend towards God and be united with him. Lossky posits that the human will of the first ancestors veered from the path of ascent, separating them from God by nature and sin.²⁹⁶ Thus, death came to humankind on a physical, spiritual and eternal plane, alienating them from their “Source of Life”²⁹⁷ and submitting their “fallen human nature to the ‘powers of darkness...’”²⁹⁸ In order that humanity might attain union with God, their eternal vocation, the triple barrier of sin, death, and nature had to be broken. Fallen humanity must now seek its salvation. Lossky argues that emphasis on the removal of the obstacles of sin and death that have decayed human nature, threw a negative light on the concept of salvation. “One is saved from something—from death, and from sin—its root,” he writes.²⁹⁹ Aghiorgoussis writes of “the negative dimension of salvation”³⁰⁰ which liberates humanity from its “state of decay”³⁰¹ to which it has fallen. Chrestou concurs, noting the limiting scope of the term ‘salvation.’ He posits that ‘salvation’ suggests that Christ’s work liberates humankind from “imprisonment, captivity and slavery.”³⁰² As long as the barriers of sin, death and nature separated them from God, humankind would never be saved or be able to achieve deification through ascent.

²⁹⁶ Lossky, 135.

²⁹⁷ Aghiorgoussis, 129.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Lossky, 135.

³⁰⁰ Aghiorgoussis, 115.

³⁰¹ Aghiorgoussis, 115.

³⁰² Chrestou, 43.

God, however, descends to humanity and breaks through the barriers of death, sin and nature in inverse order.³⁰³ Christ's saving work relinquishes the triple division between God and the human race. Kavasilas explains:

Therefore, though [humankind] [was] triply separated from God—by nature, by sin, and by death—yet the Savior made them to attain Him perfectly and to be immediately united to Him by successively removing all obstacles. The first barrier he removed by partaking of [humanity], the second by being put to death on a cross. As for the final barrier, the tyranny of death, He eliminated it completely from our nature by rising again.³⁰⁴

Indicating the correlation between *theosis* and the Incarnation of the Divine *Logos*, Lossky refers to Maximus' teaching:

For St. Maximus, the incarnation (σάρκωσις) and deification (θεώσις) correspond to one another; they mutually imply each other. God descends to the world and becomes [human] and [the human person] is raised towards divine fullness and becomes god, because this union of two natures, the divine and the human, has been determined in the eternal counsel of God, and it is the final end for which the world has been created out of nothing.³⁰⁵

From this perspective, salvation embraces the sanctification and the deification of humankind; the fulfillment of the human vocation of life in communion with God and in his grace.³⁰⁶ In the words of St. Irenaeus, continually echoed by the Fathers, "God became [human] in order that [humankind] might become god."³⁰⁷ Christ's descent to

³⁰³ Lossky, 136.

³⁰⁴ Kavasilas, *The Life in Christ* III:3, 106.

³⁰⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor, *Quaestiones ad Thalassium* 60, *Patrologia Graeca*, t.90, 621AB; quoted in Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 136.

³⁰⁶ Aghiorgoussis, 115.

³⁰⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses* V, *preface*, *Patrologia Graeca* 7, col. 1120; quoted in Lossky, 134.

humankind in the Incarnation reveals “the very essence of Christianity,”³⁰⁸ as the means for humanity to ascend to God. *Theosis*, is at the heart of Christianity. As Lossky notes:

An effable descent of God to the ultimate limit of our fallen human condition, even unto death—a descent of God which opens to [humankind] a path of ascent. The unlimited vistas of the union of created beings with the Divinity.³⁰⁹

Incapable of [his/her] own salvation, the human person could only be brought back in communion with God through a divine hypostasis, the incarnate Son of God. This plan is the divine economy, the divine dispensation of God. According to Aghioroussis, “God the Father conceives the plan, the Son executes it, the Holy Spirit fulfills it and leads it to perfection and finalization.”³¹⁰ Kavasilas notes that the incarnation of the Son of God clearly manifests God’s love and benevolence to the human race. God pours out “all the riches of His being in human nature”³¹¹ in the person of Christ, whose life and deeds express the unconditional love of God³¹² that descends upon all creation. This point is crucial in Eastern Christian theology. *Theosis* implies the Incarnation so that human nature can be united with the divine nature. This truth is confessed in the Creed of Nicea, “for us [men and women] and for our salvation.”³¹³ The affinity between the Incarnation and *theosis* in patristic thought clearly warns against a theology that is limited to or dominated by the notion of redemption. Such an argument restricts its focus to human salvation and overlooks God’s eternal plan to draw all things to Him. This plan is not to

³⁰⁸ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 97.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

³¹⁰ Aghioroussis, 132.

³¹¹ Kavasilas, 119.

³¹² Kavasilas, 118-119.

³¹³ The Daughters of St. Paul, 596.

minimize the passion, death and resurrection of Christ as central to the divine economy. It does, however, guard against an interpretation of the divine plan that tends toward christocentrism.³¹⁴ Chrestou credits the teaching of the Fathers that links the Incarnation to the *theosis* of humanity. He argues that Christ's incarnation extends far beyond the redemption of the human race because "*theosis* is that which is higher and more precious than the redemption of fallen [humankind]."³¹⁵ He continues to argue that the sin of the first ancestors did not change God's eternal plan or his will. He argues that humanity's "original destiny was to glorify God and to participate in his glory..."³¹⁶ To share God's glory is to participate in the uncreated energy of God. This "divine character"³¹⁷ is made possible through the Incarnation. The Incarnation of the Son of God raised humanity to a higher level than it could have achieved on its own; the realization of *theosis*. Chrestou notes that the Incarnation was the purpose of the creation of humanity. Indeed, the theology of the Incarnation of the Son of God extends beyond the redemption of humanity to embrace the theological vision of *theosis*.

The Incarnation of the Son of God accomplishes God's eternal purpose that all creation will be glorified through *theosis*. St. Paul writes:

To me, the very least of all the holy ones, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the inscrutable riches of Christ, and to bring to light [for all] what is the plan of the mystery hidden from ages past in God who created all things, so that the manifold wisdom of God might now be known through the Church to the principalities and authorities in the heavens. This was according to the

³¹⁴ Lossky, 98.

³¹⁵ Chrestou, 45.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*

eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord...(Ephesians 3:8-12)³¹⁸

St. Paul is referring to God's eternal plan for the deification of humankind that is accomplished by Christ's Incarnation. According to Aghioroussis, the Incarnation models for humankind that human nature is perfected through loving obedience and communion with God.³¹⁹ It also assures the salvation of human nature because of the "hypostatic union of [the] human and divine natures in Christ."³²⁰ Maximus believes that Christ achieved what Adam failed to do by restoring the whole of the created cosmos, uniting it to himself and presenting it to the Father.³²¹ In Christ, the new Adam, the fullness of God's wisdom is revealed. Through his Incarnation, the purpose of all creation is realized: the deification of all humanity and creation.

In his development of Eastern Orthodox soteriology, Aghiorgoussis links the Incarnation of the Son of God with *theosis*. In his view, "sin, death, submission to the devil,"³²² and human nature are the obstacles to deification. Christ overcame the barrier of nature with the Incarnation. Jesus' cross and resurrection defeated the obstacles of sin and death. Christ's descent into hell conquered the dominion of the devil.³²³ Christ, the new Adam, triumphs over death and corruption that were introduced to created nature by

³¹⁸ Lossky, 137-138.

³¹⁹ Aghiorgoussis, 136-137.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 135.

³²¹ St. Maximus the Confessor, *De Ambiguis*, *Patrologia Graeca*, t.91, 1308; quoted in Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 137.

³²² Aghiorgoussis, 137.

³²³ Maximos Aghiorgoussis, "The Dogmatic Tradition of the Orthodox Church," *A Companion to the Greek Orthodox Church* (New York: Greek Orthodox Archdiocese, 1984), 160-161; quoted in Aghioroussis, 137.

the first Adam.³²⁴ Humanity is restored to well being, and is once again able to share in life with God.³²⁵ In the following text, Chrestou highlights the glorious event of Christ's descent in the Incarnation:

The Incarnation is a paradox...and creates an unexpected adaptation of the archetype to the antitype. This is a reversal of the regular course of affairs, but it is a necessity because of the antitype's inability to adapt to the archetype, as demanded by [his/her] destiny. By an inconceivable process, this movement transfers the eternal to the sphere of time and eliminates the temporal...And this is the greatest mystery—the greatest miracle in the history of the world...the fact that the divine presence directs itself downward, deigning to become like that which lives there (without being transposed...), is the most incomprehensible event and, also, the greatest manifestation of power...The union of God and [humankind] in Christ is the great and hidden mystery, the happy *telos* for which things were made...³²⁶

The Fathers were grounded in the teaching that the *telos* of the divine dispensation is *theosis*, the ultimate recapitulation in Christ of all creation.³²⁷ Christ, the *Logos* of God, is the beginning of all creation. As Incarnate, He is the eschatological goal through whom and in whom all exist. The Incarnation, therefore, is the pre-condition of the final deification of creation.³²⁸ Christ descends so that all creation can ascend.

The Cross and the Holy Spirit

In his criticism of Anselm's theory of substitution³²⁹ Lossky argues that Anselm's theology of redemption is lacking in its treatment of *theosis*. With an emphasis on human

³²⁴ Aghioroussis, *In the Image of God*, 138.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 118.

³²⁶ Chrestou, 35-36.

³²⁷ Lossky, 110.

³²⁸ Meyendorff, 161.

³²⁹ In his work, *Cur Deus Homo*, Anselm of Canterbury posits that Christ became a human person and suffered death as a substitution for humanity's infinite "debt to divine justice." Lossky takes notice of Anselm's redemptionist theology that fosters a reductionist dispensation of the Holy Spirit, in *In the Image and Likeness of God* (99).

guilt and the need for divine satisfaction, little interest is taken in Christ's victory over sin and death.³³⁰ Christ's death, resurrection and ascension banish these obstacles forever.

Lossky notes, "God descends to the ...abysses, opened in creation by Adam's sin, so that [humankind] might ascend to divinity."³³¹ Human nature is thus restored by grace, and death no longer blocks the human race from deification.³³² In the liturgy, the cross and the resurrection of Christ are lauded as the vehicles of joy for humankind:

Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ, let us worship the holy Lord Jesus, the only sinless One. We praise and glorify Thy holy Resurrection; for Thou art our God, and we have no other than Thee; we call on Thy name. Come all you faithful, let us venerate Christ's holy Resurrection! For, behold, through the Cross, joy has come into all the world. Let us ever bless the Lord, praising His Resurrection, for by enduring the Cross for us, He has destroyed death by death.³³³

Meyendorff observes that the Eastern Fathers treat "redemption by substitution"³³⁴ in a much broader context. The Incarnation of the *Logos* of God, through divine condescension, united all humanity to Christ, destroyed sin and death, and achieved the deification of the human race. St. Gregory Nazianzen testifies that "what is not assumed is not healed, and what is united to God is saved."³³⁵ Therefore, he continues, "we needed a God made flesh and put to death in order that we could live again."³³⁶ The

³³⁰ Lossky, 99.

³³¹ Lossky, *Orthodox Theology*, 92.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ [St. John Chrysostom], "Hymns of the Resurrection", *Service Books of The Orthodox Church*, vol. I: *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1984), 92.

³³⁴ Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 160.

³³⁵ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Epistle 101 ad Cledonium*, *Patrologia Graeca* 37:181c-184a; quoted in Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology*, 160.

³³⁶ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Homily 45*, *Patrologia Graeca* 36:661c; quoted in Meyendorff, 160.

Resurrection of Christ is the cause of Christian joy. Christ's conquers death by his death and Resurrection.

In Eastern thought, Christ's redemptive death on a cross is viewed not so much in terms of an act of retribution for the sins of humanity as it is revered for its victory over sin and death.³³⁷ During the liturgy for Holy Pascha, the Choir echoes the triumphant victory of the Cross of Christ: "Christ is risen from the dead, trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."³³⁸ In the traditional Byzantine iconography of the Resurrection, Meyendorff observes the "dynamic soteriological dimension of Christ's death."³³⁹ The icon displays Christ breaking through the gates of Sheol and raising Adam and Eve to life. Meyendorff argues that divinity has overtaken the devil's power over humankind³⁴⁰ and death. Christ's Resurrection robs death of its power over humankind's fate, liberating them from the imprisonment of sin.³⁴¹

St. Athanasius teaches that "the death of all was accomplished in the Lord's body,"³⁴² a death that "must needs be suffered on behalf of all, that the debt owing from all might be paid."³⁴³ The immortal Word, through his union with a mortal body, destroyed the power of the devil, the consequences of death and the bondage of sin.³⁴⁴

³³⁷ Meyendorff, 161.

³³⁸ [St. John Chrysostom], "Paschal Beginning of the Liturgy of the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ," 152.

³³⁹ Meyendorff, 162.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² St. Athanasius, *Incarnation of the Word* 20:5, 47.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 20:6-7.

Christ destroys corruption by the grace of his resurrection, allowing dissolution to the body's mortal nature until the resurrection.³⁴⁵

For like the seeds which are cast into the earth, we do not perish by dissolution, but sown in the earth, shall rise again, death having been brought to nought by the grace of the Savior. Hence, it is that blessed Paul, who was made a surety of the Resurrection to all, says: 'This corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality; but when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that it is written, death is swallowed up in victory. O death where is thy sting? O grave where is thy victory?'³⁴⁶

The mortal and corruptible body dissolves into the earth after death as a consequence of sin and the 'garments of skin.' Christ's resurrection from the dead is the promise and hope to all human creation that the mortal and corruptible body shall be raised immortal and incorruptible at the resurrection on the last day. Christ's victory over death destroys the power of death forever, meriting the fruits of the resurrection for all humankind and the transfiguration of the entire cosmos.

The redemption theology of Athanasius focuses on the "physical...biological"³⁴⁷ effects of Christ's body delivered to death. Humanity inherits the fruits of Christ's resurrection: incorruptibility, expiation of original guilt, and the victory of life over death. The image of Christ as Victor, according to Lossky, serves to complete the juridical view of atonement that is prevalent in Anselm's thought.³⁴⁸ St. Gregory of Nazianzen also believes that humankind was in need of the sanctification brought about by the humanity of Christ. He posits that Christ alone offers freedom from the power of Satan and the

³⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 21:1.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 21:2.

³⁴⁷ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 100.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid*.

means of humanity's ascent to God. "Let the rest of the mystery be venerated silently," he adds,³⁴⁹ recalling the stupendous mystery and hope of Christian faith: Christ reigns victorious over death and sin.

Lossky's objection to the juridical view taken by Anselm centers on the inadequate expression of the richness of redemption, so well treated by the Eastern Fathers. To limit 'redemption' to a substitutionary perspective severs its meaning from the fullness of the great truth it reveals.

Even if redemption appears as the central aspect of the Incarnation, i.e., of the dispensation of the Son toward the fallen world, it is but one aspect of the vaster dispensation of the Holy Trinity toward being created *ex nihilo* and called to reach deification freely—to reach union with God, so that 'God may be all in all.'³⁵⁰

Lossky attributes the limited scope of Anselm's substitutionary theory to an insufficient pneumatological development in the West at that time.³⁵¹ Salvation, as a personal reality, is the work of the Holy Spirit and is inseparable from the redeeming work of the Son. Through the Spirit, Christ is revealed and formed in humanity, bestowing the gifts of new life in Christ and sanctification. Enlightened and vivified by the "Source of Sanctification,"³⁵² humanity ascends to the Father through the Incarnate Son of God. Hence, the economy of the Holy Spirit reveals the positive dimension of salvation whereby humanity shares in the life of the Holy Trinity; sanctification only possible

³⁴⁹ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 45:22, *Patrologia Graeca* 36, col. 653; quoted in Lossky, 102.

³⁵⁰ Lossky, 102-103.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

³⁵² Term of reference to the Holy Spirit commonly associated with St. Basil, as noted in Aghioroussis, *In the Image of God*, 140.

through the economy of the Holy Spirit.³⁵³ Lossky argues that the redemptive work of Christ is the necessary pre-condition for the sanctifying and deifying work of the Holy Spirit. At the same time, he notes, it is only through reception of the Spirit that one confesses the divinity of Christ. According to Lossky, “The Son has become like us by the Incarnation; we become like Him by deification, by partaking of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, who communicates the divinity to *each* person in a particular way.”³⁵⁴ The faithful acknowledge the divinity of the Holy Spirit and entreat His saving grace as they adore Christ, “Come, let us worship and fall down before Christ, O Gracious Comforter, save us who sing to Thee: Alleluia!”³⁵⁵ Participation in the divinity of the Holy Spirit conforms one to Christ by deification. Ultimately, both works are inseparable as the one divine dispensation of the Triune God whose plan and will to draw all of creation into divine communion manifest the richness of redemption.³⁵⁶

Aghiorgoussis highlights the pneumatological dimension of deification. He argues that the Holy Spirit is the source and the cause of human sanctification.³⁵⁷ Those who confess belief in Christ are offered the grace of salvation in the Holy Spirit.³⁵⁸ Invoking St. Paul, Aghiorgoussis observes that each layer of sanctification is destined for the deification of humanity: predestination, vocation, justification and glorification:

For those He [God] foreknew He [God] also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, so that He might be firstborn among many brothers. And those He

³⁵³ Aghiorgoussis, 140.

³⁵⁴ Lossky, 109.

³⁵⁵ *Entrance Hymn of Pentecost Sunday, The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom*, 163.

³⁵⁶ Lossky, 109-110.

³⁵⁷ Aghiorgoussis, 142.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

predestined He also called: and those He called he also justified; and those He justified He also glorified. (Rom 8:29-30)

Like Lossky, Aghiourgoussis agrees that the fullness of the divine dispensation cannot be articulated by the substitutionary theory alone. To do so would undermine the deifying action of the Holy Spirit. Referencing Meyendorff, Aghiourgoussis summarizes the heart of Christian soteriology:

Communion in the risen body of Christ: participation in divine life; sanctification through the energy of God, which penetrates true humanity and restores it to its “natural” state, rather than justification, or remission of inherited guilt...”³⁵⁹

He adds that God’s Holy Spirit, in whom humanity is justified, is responsible for the sanctification of each person.³⁶⁰ The sanctification brought about by the Holy Spirit is a participation in the very life of God that ultimately draws the entire cosmos into participation in the divine communion, transfiguring the entire created universe.³⁶¹ Through the divinizing grace of the Holy Spirit, human nature is transformed and deified.³⁶²

“The Ark of Salvation”³⁶³

Stavropoulos claims that all the objective means necessary for the deification of humankind are available in the Church.³⁶⁴ He writes, “In the sphere of the Church, the Holy Spirit mystically sanctifies and unites the faithful with Christ, thus creating and

³⁵⁹ Meyendorff, 146.

³⁶⁰ Aghiourgoussis, 144.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 144-145.

³⁶³ Aghiourgoussis, “*Dogmatic Tradition*,” 165-166; quoted in Aghiourgoussis, 145.

³⁶⁴ Stavropoulos, 30.

giving life to the mystical body of the Lord.”³⁶⁵ Through grace, the vivifying action of the Holy Spirit breathes the presence of the Kingdom of God into the present age, bestowing His sanctifying gifts on the world. Transforming the faithful into the new People of God, the Holy Spirit deifies Christian life.³⁶⁶ In Stavropoulos’ view, it is only through the divinizing power of the Holy Spirit that humankind achieves *theosis*.³⁶⁷ Stavropoulos argues that the “holy mysteries” (sacraments)³⁶⁸ are the source of the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, the faithful are welcomed into God’s life and membership in his body, the Church as they begin their journey towards *theosis*.³⁶⁹ Baptism is a participation in the death and resurrection of Christ that merits the gifts of immortality, incorruptibility and eternal life. Baptism also makes the faithful worthy of divine filiation granted in the Holy Spirit.³⁷⁰ Holy Chrismation (confirmation) seals the Christian with the personal and “abiding presence”³⁷¹ of the Holy Spirit who fortifies the believer in the Christian life and brings to fruition the work of sanctification and eventual deification. Penance, “the gate of grace,”³⁷² continually heals and renews the Christian. Transformed by grace, [he/she] grows in union with God and the rejection of sin.³⁷³ True repentance originates in the depths of the soul and cleanses the heart

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 30-31.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.* 32-33.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 33.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 37.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 43-48.

³⁷¹ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 96.

³⁷² Stavropoulos, 50.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 51-52.

where one is comforted by the presence of the Holy Spirit.³⁷⁴ Stavropoulos describes repentance:

Thus, each day the soul is strengthened and becomes a fertile field, providing the fruits of the Holy Spirit for harvest. At the appropriate time, like a ripe sheaf of wheat, it gives up its fruits. It is like an unending source of food for the soul, leading to eternal and uncorrupted life. Achieving this condition...the soul becomes a residence for the divine, a home and residence of the Holy Trinity.³⁷⁵

Stavropoulos insists on the importance of this holy mystery in the life of the Christian.

He argues that the soul must continually be disposed to the spirit of conversion so that one is always mindful of the need for transformation into the likeness of God.³⁷⁶ In the

mystery of the Holy Eucharist, Stavropoulos finds the source of humanity's deification.

It is the "concrete realization of the unity of human nature with Christ.[and] the members of the Church."³⁷⁷ Holy Matrimony is the actualization of the mystery of the union of

Christ and His Church. Grounded in the love of Christ, married couples are transformed by their daily lives of service, sacrifice and forgiveness.³⁷⁸ Through Holy Orders, the

priest draws all to unity in Christ, especially in the Eucharist, as Christ is made present in a sacramental way.³⁷⁹ The Sacrament of the Anointing of the Sick offers strength, hope

and healing in the face of illness or death. This sacrament is key to understanding that

true healing is a spiritual transformation that finds its redemptive source in the sufferings

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53-54.

³⁷⁶ Stavropoulos, 50-51.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 56.

³⁷⁸ Schmemmann, 102-105.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 106.

and death of Christ.³⁸⁰ The sacramental nature of the Church makes Her the gathering place for the salvation of all creation. Through the Holy Mysteries, the Church is born into communion with God and nurtured on her journey to the Kingdom. In the sacraments, the faithful participate in the mysteries of Christ as a foretaste and a promise of the fullness of life in the Kingdom. In the sacramental life of the Church, God visits His People and makes them His own.

Like a ship *en route* to its destination, the Church gathers all believers to share in her life of grace. At the same time, She embraces the needs of all people, in hopes of bringing them to salvation. Endowed with the strength of the Holy Spirit, the Church is the giver of Truth, the refuge to the lost, a beacon to those in darkness, a haven of hope to the despairing, and the locus of God's presence in the Word and Sacraments. The sanctifying and divinizing grace of the Holy Spirit leads the Church through history as She fulfills her mission to sanctify, to save and to deify the world.

The Incarnation of the Son of God set in motion the salvation of all creation.³⁸¹ By assuming humanity, Christ deified all of human nature, enabling humankind to participate in divinity, and to become sons and daughters of God by grace.³⁸² On the day of Pentecost, the gift of the Holy Spirit was given to the world. The Spirit's presence established a Church whose mission was to unify, to sanctify, and to deify all creation. As Lossky notes, the Holy Spirit imparts the "first-fruits of sanctification upon human

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

³⁸¹ Aghiorgoussis, *In the Image of God*, 152.

³⁸² Ware, *The Orthodox Way*, 98.

persons,”³⁸³ deifying them as He unites them to Christ.³⁸⁴ St. Seraphim describes this grace as “the Kingdom of God that the Holy Spirit prepares within us.”³⁸⁵ Lossky adds that grace “is the divine life which is opened up within us in the Holy Spirit.”³⁸⁶

The Church is the *locus* of humanity’s deification. She is the “ark of salvation,”³⁸⁷ the presence in this world of the Kingdom of God, and the mediator of the sanctification and deification of humanity. Through her sacramental life, and especially in the Eucharist, the Church accomplishes her mission of uniting all to God in Christ for the ultimate salvation and deification of the world³⁸⁸ until the end of time. On that day, the resurrection of the dead will initiate the new creation when Christ will complete the final judgment of the world:

‘A new heaven and a new earth will be established, indwelt by righteousness.’ (2Pet: 13) The Kingdom of God will be fully established; the Church will cease to exist. Finally, the Son of God will turn the Kingdom over to God the Father, ‘that God may be everything to everyone.’ (1Cor 15:28)³⁸⁹

When Christ returns for the final judgment and to render the Kingdom to the Father, salvation will be complete.³⁹⁰

Conclusion

The doctrine of *theosis* has greatly influenced soteriological thought in the Eastern Christian tradition. As demonstrated by Fairbairn’s salvation models, Eastern

³⁸³ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 170.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 171.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

³⁸⁷ Aghioroussis, 145.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 173.

³⁹⁰ Aghiorgoussis, 152.

Christianity upholds the belief that the true nature and ultimate destiny of the human person is inherently linked to the theological understanding of creation, the fall of humanity, and redemption. The two-act model, characteristic of the Eastern tradition, clearly posits that humanity's vocation to *theosis* and the ultimate deification of the entire created cosmos is fulfilled in the act of elevation to a new level of being. To further understanding on this point, the second chapter of this investigation has examined the salient Christian themes of creation, the fall, and redemption from an Eastern Christian perspective so as to shed light on their significance relative to human nature, human destiny and *theosis*. It is clearly evident that the doctrine of *theosis* has consistently shaped theological thought in each of these areas.

Fundamental to the development of Eastern Christian thought is the teaching of the Eastern Fathers that the deification and sanctification of the entire created cosmos is the eternal purpose of creation.³⁹¹ Twentieth century Eastern Christian theologians continue to extrapolate on this theme. Lossky posits that the primitive beatitude of the first ancestors was a state of order that was ordained toward deification. Like Maximus, he argues, “everything in the created world is in a state of becoming!”³⁹² The vocation of the human person created in the divine image is to realize total union with God. Humanity's cosmic nature reveals the interdependency humanity shares with the world. This truth reveals God's plan that humanity is called to bring the whole created cosmos into that union. Staniloae posits that humanity's vocation is to

³⁹¹ Fairbairn, 65.

³⁹² Lossky, 98.

transform the world and return it as gift to God who gives it to humankind as a means of dialogue and communion with them.³⁹³ As the masterpiece of God's creation, the human person is called to transform the earth in communion with others so that all creation might be saved through human efforts in solidarity with one another.

Humanity receives this capacity to channel grace to the cosmos by virtue of the kinship with God breathed into them at creation. Through Christ, humanity is incorporated into the saving work of God which embraces all of creation.

According to Eastern Christian soteriological thought, the initial created state of humanity becomes the premise that subsumes the *lapsus* as a failure to achieve one's initial vocation to *theosis*. Unlike the Western model of salvation, which views the Fall as a separate event in the story of salvation, the Eastern tradition views the fall of humanity as a turning away from God and the original state of innocence. Humanity's relationship of intimacy with God is severed. Evil has entered the world through the will of Adam. This belief becomes significant in the development of theological thought. It also accounts for the two-act schema in the Eastern Christian model of salvation proposed by Fairbairn. While the Western model adheres to the position that a new condition for humanity existed after the Fall, the East does not consider the *lapsus* as a separate act in the salvation model. In Eastern Christian thought, humanity's original created state was not considered to be identical with the realized state of deification. Through the freedom exercised by the human will, Adam's choice away from God corrupted his nature, introducing sin and death into the world and

³⁹³ Staniloae, 5.

forever changing the intended use of the material cosmos. Rather than a means of dialogue and communion with God, Adam perceived the material world as an end in itself which ultimately led to sin and death. God's benevolent providence, however, insured human nature's return to its natural condition by means of the theology of the 'garments of skin.' Although the 'garments' wrapped the human race in mortality, they provided the mode of survival, even in physical death, so that God's eternal plan for creation would be realized.

According to Eastern thought, 'elevation' defines God's plan to raise humanity and creation to a new level of being in its final realization of *theosis*. As the second and final act in Fairbairn's Eastern model, this approach expands soteriological thought to wider horizons than the model of redemption. Christ came "for us" *and* "for our salvation." The elevation theory serves to substantiate the teaching of the Fathers that God became human so that humanity might become like god. This truth supports the fundamental patristic vision that links the doctrine of salvation to *theosis*. The Incarnation of the Son of God redeems humanity from corruption and mortality and provides the means whereby the entire created universe joins humanity in realizing its transformation into union with the triune God in the Kingdom.

The doctrine of *theosis* continues to propel Eastern theological thought in the same direction: "communion in the risen body of Christ; participation in divine life; and sanctification through the energy of God."³⁹⁴ According to Aghiorgoussis, it is:

The grace of the Holy Spirit given to all...[through the Church] as the ark of

³⁹⁴ Meyendorff, 146.

salvation...the locus where salvation in Christ and the Spirit is to be found and accomplished...[through the sacraments] and especially the sacrament of communion (*koinonia*) with God and one another, the Holy Eucharist...³⁹⁵

Theosis has informed the articulation of the salient Christian themes of creation, fall, and elevation; themes that constitute the doctrine of salvation. Through its lens, one is better able to “engage Eastern Christianity on its own terms”³⁹⁶ and to appreciate the vision of wholeness and harmony that it brings to all dimensions of theological thought.

In Chapter Three, “*Theosis: ‘The Blessed Telos For Which All Things Were Made,’*” an examination of the doctrine of *theosis* will trace the development of this fundamental Eastern Christian teaching from a scriptural and patristic perspective. The voices of the early Fathers, Christian mystics, and Eastern Christian theologians who have contributed the most compelling arguments toward the doctrinal formulation, will provide the content for the chapter.

³⁹⁵ Aghiorgoussis, 151.

³⁹⁶ Fairbairn, 2.

CHAPTER THREE

THEOSIS: “THE BLESSED *TELOS* FOR WHICH ALL THINGS WERE MADE”¹

Introduction

Deification is in fact beyond every name. This is why we...have never dared hitherto to write about deification. But now, since there is a necessity to speak, we will speak words of piety (by the grace of the Lord), but words inadequate to describe. For when spoken about, deification remains ineffable, and (as the Fathers teach us) can be given a name only by those who have received it.²

Rather than attempt to define *theosis*, or deification, which “will not suffer the limitation of strict definition,”³ the goal of this chapter is to consider the concept of deification from the perspective of participation in the divine life of the Trinity of Persons. According to Russell’s patristic categorizations, there are four models that embrace the early Father’s use of *theosis* language as nominal, analogical or metaphorical.⁴ The first model, “the titular or nominal model,”⁵ includes the usage of the biblical term “gods” as simply a title of honor.⁶ The “analogical,” or second model, interprets phrases like “...Moses was a god to Pharaoh as a wise man is a god to a fool; or humans become sons and gods by grace in relation to Christ who is Son and God ‘by nature.’”⁷ The metaphorical approach contains the remaining two models: the ethical and the realistic. The ethical model is rooted in Plato’s concept of *homoiosis*, i.e., attaining

¹ Gregory Nazianzus, *To Thallasios*, 60; quoted in Daniel Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1994), 120.

² St. Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads* III. I. 32, ed. John Meyendorff (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 87.

³ D. Winslow, *The Dynamics of Salvation: A Study in Gregory of Nazianzus*, Patristic Monograph Series 7 (Cambridge: The Philadelphia Patristic Foundation, 1979), 193; quoted in Bartos, 18, n. 42.

⁴ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 1.

⁵ Bartos, 9.

⁶ Russell, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*

likeness to God through ascetic and philosophical endeavors. The realistic model “assumes that human beings are transformed by deification.”⁸ Within this model are two further subdivisions: 1) an ontological aspect which claims that human nature is transformed by the Incarnation; and 2) a dynamic aspect that appropriates deified humanity by means of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. The realistic model describes Plato’s idea of *methexis*, that is, participation in God.⁹ Russell’s use of Plato’s thought concepts prove that “analogy, imitation and participation...form a continuum rather than express radically different kinds of relationship.”¹⁰ He notes:

Their meanings are distinct, but their spheres of reference overlap. Although the latter is the stronger term, they both seek to express the relationship between Being and becoming, between that which exists in an absolute sense and that which exists contingently. *Methexis* has been defined in the following way: ‘Participation’ is the name of the ‘relation’ which accounts for the togetherness of elements of diverse ontological type in the essential unity of a single instance. In this sense, it is a real relation, one constitutive of the *nexus qua nexus* which arises from it.¹¹

Humanity’s vocation to *theosis* is the call to a relationship of participation between created and contingent humanity and the uncreated Being of God. In the realistic model proposed by Russell, the Fathers of the Church grounded their teaching of the doctrine of *theosis* in the Incarnation of the Son of God and the transformation of human nature. Individual deification was appropriated by means of the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist which became the tangible means of participation in the divine life of the Trinity of Persons. Given the fact that this investigation has associated the concept of *theosis* or deification with the idea of relationality and participation, chapter three will

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁹ *Ibid.* 2-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹¹ Charles P. Bigger, *Participation: A Platonic Inquiry* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1968, 7; quoted in Russell, 2.

treat the concept of *theosis* primarily from the perspective of the realistic model, as defined by Russell, with intermittent references made to the ethical model. These limits will enable the investigation to center on the doctrinal, anthropological and mystical dimensions of *theosis* that have remained key to Eastern Christian theology to the present time. The content of this chapter will be framed by a select representation of the early Fathers, mystics and theologians whose insights and contributions not only synthesize, but serve to complement and to captivate the theological and anthropological aspects of *theosis*, while concurrently submitting to the ineffable nature of this foundational doctrine.

These are the views of the main dialogue partners presented in the discussion of *theosis*. Although the second century apologist, Theophilus of Antioch, never uses the term, *theosis*, his work introduces incorruptibility, divine likeness and immortality as prominent themes of the doctrine. Like many of the early apologists, Theophilus' work is associated with eschatological divinization.¹² St. Irenaeus furthers the development of *theosis* with the introduction of the role of the Incarnation of the *Logos* and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in the deification of humanity. His work adds a physical dimension to deification that claims that the whole of human nature, body and soul, is transformed by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Like Theophilus, Irenaeus does not use the term *theosis*. He does, however, develop these central themes: perfection of the human person, created grace, transformation of human nature and human participation in divine glory.¹³ St. Athanasius' contribution to the doctrine of *theosis* is based on his teaching that the goal of the Incarnation is the deification of humanity. He teaches that

¹² Gross, 118.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 120-130.

the Holy Spirit makes possible the divinization brought by the deifying body of the Word. Athanasius is also credited for distinguishing between God's act of creating the nature of the human person and his act of adopting humanity by grace.¹⁴ The doctrinal development reaches its peak in the fourth century with the work of Gregory of Nyssa. Rather than using *theosis* language, Gregory prefers to speak of participation. He proffers that *theosis* begins in the awareness of the utter transcendent God.¹⁵ Through his treatise on *The Life of Moses*, Gregory demonstrates how God beckons humankind into relationship with Him in the mystery of darkness. St. John Climacus¹⁶ and St. Symeon the New Theologian¹⁷ posit that deification is a participation in divine light. They and others of the hesychast tradition, associate deification with the experience of the contemplation of the uncreated light of God. Their claim was refuted by Barlaam and his followers who argued that God could not be seen or experienced. The light, in their view, was either of an angelic nature, or was a created manifestation.¹⁸ Gregory of Palamas' defense of the hesychasts resulted in the official establishment of hesychasm as a monastic tradition and the official sanction of the doctrine of the distinction of the divine essence and divine energies.¹⁹

It will become clear that the theological roots of *theosis* run deep and exert a widespread influence on doctrinal matters that relate to trinitarian, christological,

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 163-175.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 176-189.

¹⁶ John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 38.

¹⁷ Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 302.

¹⁸ Mantzaridis, 97.

¹⁹ John Meyendorff, ed., *Gregory Palamas: The Triads* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 7.

pneumatological, soteriological, anthropological, ecclesiological, sacramental and eschatological issues. Williams notes that there is a “systematic significance”²⁰ to the doctrine of *theosis* that is “so all-encompassing”²¹ and “ultimately touches on almost every major branch of Christian doctrine.”²² *Theosis* themes are also deeply imbedded in the Scriptures. Gregory of Nyssa uncovers the doctrinal theme of divine transcendence in the account of Moses on Mt. Sinai. St. Gregory of Palamas uncovers the “hermeneutical key to approach the question of deification”²³ in the biblical account of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. Scriptural and patristic sources reveal that *theosis* lies within the eternal will and plan of God and is the essence of Christian life. A more thorough review of the liturgy would reveal it as the theological source *par excellence*.

Any theological reflection of *theosis* worthy of its substance ought to originate from a challenge posed by Schmemmann to the Christian world. The task that lies before the Church, he argues, is to “return to the ‘one thing needed,’ to the essentially eschatological nature of her faith and of her life.”²⁴ Such a challenge requires a “radical rethinking of our theological enterprise, of its structure and methodology, of its ultimate roots, of that which makes it possible.”²⁵ Therefore, one must venture beyond the biblical and patristic texts of the doctrine of deification as more than mere sources of

²⁰ A.N. Williams, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and Palamas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 7.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Bartos, 12.

²⁴ Schmemmann, *Church, World, Mission*, 83.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

authority; one must discover in their testimonies, the Truth and the Life that they convey.²⁶ Schmemmann writes:

It is not enough simply to quote the Fathers, to make them into ‘authorities’ certifying our every theological proposition, for it is not quotations, be they scriptural or patristic, that constitute the ground of theology, but the experience of the Church. And since, in the ultimate analysis, she has no other experience but that of the Kingdom, since her whole life is rooted in that unique experience, there can be no other source, no other ground and no other criterion for theology; if it is truly to be the expression of the Church’s faith and the reflection on that faith.²⁷

Schmemmann’s insight suggests a return to the liturgy, the lived experience of the Church, to discover the source of Truth and Life. Close examination of the living Tradition of the Eastern Church verifies that authentic Christian life is life lived in the Holy Spirit. As Florovsky notes, keeping faithful to “the inner memory of the Church...,”²⁸ which alone “fully brings to life the silent testimony of the texts,”²⁹ is to surrender to the Holy Spirit. He locates Church memory within her tradition that “stands alongside Scripture as the proclaimer of truth and life.”³⁰ Within its boundaries, Eastern Christianity testifies to the life and experience of the Church.³¹ Lossky notes:

If the Scriptures and all the Church can produce in words written or pronounced, in images or in symbols liturgical or otherwise, represent the different modes of expression of the Truth, Tradition is the unique mode of receiving it... It is not the Word, but the living breath which makes the word heard at the same time as the silence from which it came; it is not the Truth, but a communication of the Spirit of Truth, outside which the Truth cannot be received.³²

²⁶ Fairbairn, 14-15.

²⁷ Schmemmann, 84.

²⁸ Georges Florovsky, *Collected Works*, vol. 6, *Ways of Russian Theology*, Part Two, trans. Robert L. Nichols (Vaduz: B  chervertriebsanstalt, 1987), 304; quoted in Fairbairn, 17.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰ Fairbairn, 18.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³² Leonid Ouspensky and Vladimir Lossky, *The Meaning of Icons*, rev. ed., trans. G.E.H. Palmer and E. Kadloubovsky (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1982), 15; quoted in Fairbairn, 19.

Tradition, therefore, is the context wherein life given to the Church by the Holy Spirit is lived and experienced.³³ It is the “experience of the Kingdom of God” that Schmemmann claims is the only true treasure which makes one capable of fulfilling the call to deification.³⁴ In Schmemmann’s view, the sacramental mysteries communicate this experience of the Kingdom in this world. The Eucharist, in a very concrete way, enables Christians to embrace Christian life as a “journey to communion with God and one another.”³⁵ The Eucharist is the taste of the Kingdom of God that deepens human hunger for the heavenly banquet. The doctrine of *theosis* aids in the articulation of this Eucharistic vision.

The Doctrine Unfolds

The development of the Christian doctrine of *theosis* spanned a period of approximately seven centuries. As early as the latter part of the first century, *theosis* themes are apparent in the *Didache*.³⁶ Gross observes that the first generation of Christians confessed that life and γνῶσις (gnosis) came through faith in Jesus Christ who brings them immortality, spiritual nourishment and eternal life at the *Parousia*. On that day, the saints will rise from the dead and accompany the Lord.³⁷ However rudimentary the soteriology of the early Church, it was clear to stress the importance of immortality.³⁸ During the second and third centuries, the Fathers began to lay the groundwork that would eventually flourish in the fourth century under the Alexandrians and the

³³ Fairbairn, 19.

³⁴ Schmemmann, 84.

³⁵ Fairbairn, 20.

³⁶ Gross, 99.

³⁷ Gross, 117.

³⁸ *Ibid.*,

Cappadocians.³⁹ With the emphasis on the event of the *Parousia*, there was a tendency, especially among the early apologists, to focus on eschatological divinization. All that was needed as earthly preparation consisted mainly of a moral conversion, highly dependent on the role of human free will. For the most part, the role of the *Logos* was mainly that of revelation and enlightenment.⁴⁰ During the fourth century, the doctrine reached its peak with the exposition of the role of the Incarnate *Logos* and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.⁴¹ From the fifth to the eighth centuries, the monastic tradition offered a mystical dimension to the doctrine from the monk's experience of divine light in prayer.⁴² Later in the fourteenth century, St. Gregory of Palamas would clarify and articulate the difference between the divine essence and divine energies, a formulation that would give the doctrine of *theosis* its present articulation.⁴³

Theophilus of Antioch

Believed to have been “the sixth bishop of Antioch in Syria from the apostles,”⁴⁴ Theophilus was a convert to Christianity who carefully studied the Scriptures and became one of the earliest commentators of the Gospel. His writings to Autolycus were possibly written to refute Autolycus' publication against Christianity.⁴⁵ Theophilus writes:

Since, then, my friend, you have assailed me with empty words, boasting of your gods of wood and stone..which neither see nor hear, for they are idols, and the work of human hands; and since, besides, you call me a Christian, as if this were a damning name to bear, I, for my part, avow that I am a Christian...⁴⁶

³⁹ *Ibid.* 115.

⁴⁰ Gross, 143-144.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 234.

⁴³ Meyendorff, 7.

⁴⁴ A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. II, *Introductory Note to Theophilus of Antioch* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 88.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁴⁶ Theophilus of Antioch, *Theophilus to Autolycus*, I, 1, 89.

One of the early apologists of the second century, Theophilus clearly expressed the idea that human persons could become gods through immortality.

Although Theophilus never uses the term “*theosis*,” his views on the transcendency of God and the creation of the human person are filled with *theosis* themes. According to the apologist, the nature of God is “incomprehensible, in greatness unfathomable, in height inconceivable, in power incomparable, in wisdom unrivalled, in goodness inimitable, in kindness unutterable.”⁴⁷ Theophilus confesses the eternal and immortal nature of God. He states, “...He is without beginning, because He is unbegotten; and He is unchangeable, because He is immortal.”⁴⁸ Regarding the human person, Theophilus claims that [he/she] is “neither mortal nor immortal.”⁴⁹

For if He had made him immortal from the beginning, He would have made him God. Again, if He had made him mortal, God would seem to be the cause of his death. Neither, then, immortal nor yet mortal did He make him, but, as we have said above, capable of both; so that if he should incline to the things of immortality, keeping the commandment of God, he should receive as reward from Him immortality, and should become god; but if, on the other hand, he should turn to the things of death, disobeying God, he should himself be the cause of death to himself.⁵⁰

Clearly, Theophilus places the nature of humanity in a category between mortal and immortal. The early apologist identifies the human person as “the only work worthy of His [God’s] own hands,”⁵¹ a dignity conferred on humankind by God who created the human person in His image and after His likeness.⁵² The seed of divine life, planted in

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I, III, 89-90.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I, IV, 90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, II, XXVII, 105.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, II, XXVII, 105.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, II, XVIII, 101.

⁵² *Ibid.*

the human person at the moment of creation, reveals the true nature of humanity.⁵³ In fact, notes Theophilus, after having matured and perfected as a result of living a life worthy of God, in chastity and holiness, faith and fear of God,⁵⁴ and “being even declared a god, he/she might thus ascend into heaven in possession of immortality.”⁵⁵ Although Theophilus insists that humankind is created in the divine image, he argues that humanity is not immortal by nature. Immortality by nature belongs only to God.⁵⁶

When thou shalt have put off the mortal, and put on incorruption, then shalt thou see God worthily. For God will raise thy flesh immortal with they soul: and then having become immortal, thou shalt see the Immortal, if now you believe [in] Him.⁵⁷

Humankind was called by God to grow in perfection so that they might become like God when they reach heaven.⁵⁸ Theophilus believes that deification takes place after physical death, provided one is obedient to God’s commands. Disobedience, on the other hand, results in death and corruption.

For God has given us a law and holy commandments; and every one who keeps these can be saved, and, obtaining the resurrection, can inherit incorruption.⁵⁹

Theophilus offers the first clear synthesis of the possibility of humanity’s divinization through immortality.⁶⁰ He clearly emphasizes that divinization is a gift from God that one claims “by assumption.”⁶¹ Human nature is not capable of immortality. Further, the immortality and incorruptibility that humanity assumes in heaven is not the “absolute

⁵³ Frances Colie, “Mary: Model for Christian Life and Community,” in *Windows to the East: Eastern Christians in a Dialogue of Charity*, ed. Jaroslav Z. Skira and Myroslaw I. Tataryn (Ottawa: Novalis, 2001), 215.

⁵⁴ Theophilus of Antioch, I, VII, 91.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, II, XIX, 102.

⁵⁶ Gross, 117-118.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, I, VII, 91.

⁵⁸ Gross, 118.

⁵⁹ Theophilus of Antioch II, XXVII, 105.

⁶⁰ Gross, 118.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

incorruptibility”⁶² of God. This highlights the fact that divinization, in his thought, is granted to those worthy of eternal life. However bent towards an eschatological deification it may be, Theophilus’ thought does offer a starting point from which the early Fathers continue to develop their doctrinal synthesis.

St. Irenaeus of Lyons

St. Irenaeus, while considered a patristic theologian from the West, is the first to apply a theological interpretation to the concept of deification.⁶³ His significant contributions to the development of the doctrine of *theosis* provided the content for the Eastern Fathers of the fourth century, when doctrinal development flourished. As a forerunner of the early Christian tradition, Irenaeus furthered the work of those who regarded deification as eschatological in nature. By introducing a “physical or mystical conception of deification,”⁶⁴ Irenaeus taught that human nature was deified by the Incarnate *Logos* and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He posits that the Holy Spirit pours out a “superior divine likeness”⁶⁵ in the believer that embraces the soul and the body. This transforming, created grace adopts the faithful as children of God, eligible for a share in His glory.⁶⁶ In the fourth century, St. Athanasius and St. Gregory of Nyssa continue to develop the christological and pneumatological dimension of *theosis* based on these truths.

Like the apologists before him, Irenaeus sought to defend Christian beliefs. Confronted with a spirit of heresy that sought to “confound Gnosticism with

⁶² *Ibid.*

⁶³ Gross, 131.

⁶⁴ Gross, 125.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 126.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-130.

Christianity,”⁶⁷ Irenaeus produced his seminal work, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, which refuted the belief system of the Gnostics, so influential in the latter half of the second century. The work served as a constructive defense and illuminating exposition of the Christian faith.⁶⁸ Concerning the Gnostics, he writes:

For their system is blasphemous above all [others]...For as the serpent beguiled Eve, so also do these men, by pretending [to possess] superior knowledge, and [to be acquainted with] ineffable mysteries;...plunge those that believe them into death...⁶⁹

Because of the heretical attacks of the Gnostics, Irenaeus’ work exposed the truths of Christianity and provided a theological foundation for the formulation of the doctrine of *theosis*.

Irenaeus’ elaboration of the role of the Incarnation of the Son of God is key to the doctrine of *theosis*. He argues that this event “caused [humankind]...to cleave to and to become one with God.”⁷⁰ Irenaeus argues that in the Person of Christ, humanity is united with divinity so that humankind might once again be capable of immortality and achieving the divine likeness. Gross notes that Irenaeus sees in Christ the recapitulation of all humanity.⁷¹ Irenaeus describes how the Incarnation deifies humanity:

Unless a [human person] had overcome the enemy of [humanity], the enemy would not have been legitimately vanquished...unless it had been God who had freely given salvation, we could never have possessed it securely. And unless [humankind] had been joined to God, they could never have become partakers of incorruptibility. For it was incumbent upon the Mediator between God and [humankind], by his relationship to both, to bring both to friendship and concord, and present [humankind] to God while He revealed God to [humankind]. For in what way could we be partakers of the

⁶⁷ A. Cleveland Coxe, ed., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. I, *Introductory Note to Irenaeus Against Heresies* (Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1996), 310.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 311.

⁶⁹ Irenaeus of Lyons, *Irenaeus Against Heresies* IV, Preface, 3-4, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers: Translations of the Writings of the Fathers down to A.D. 325*, vol. I (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 462.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, III, XVIII, 7, 448.

⁷¹ Gross, 125.

adoption of sons, unless we had received from Him through the Son that fellowship which refers to Himself, unless His Word, having been made flesh, had entered into communion with us?⁷²

Irenaeus puts forth a doctrine of physical deification claiming that human nature is deified through the “intimate contact”⁷³ with the divine nature of Christ established through the Incarnation.⁷⁴ According to Gross, the concept of physical deification has its roots in notion of the *Logos* as the life principle as revealed in John’s Gospel.⁷⁵

The Incarnate Word is true God, Emmanuel, who brings freedom and the gift of eternal life. Irenaeus is clear that the Word is not a mere man begotten by Joseph. Those who refuse the “incorruptible Word...remain mortal flesh and are debtors to death,”⁷⁶ he adds. Irenaeus identifies Christ as the new Adam. A son of Joseph would “remain in the bondage of the old disobedience.”⁷⁷ Begotten of the Father, He is true God; born of the Virgin, He is true man:

...The angel said to him [Joseph] in sleep: ‘Fear not to take thee Mary thy wife; for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. For she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call His name Jesus; for He shall save His people from their sins.’ (Matt.1:20)⁷⁸

Irenaeus deemed it necessary to establish the divinity of the Son before submitting that human flesh was deified by the Incarnation.

For it was for this end that the Word of God was made [human], and He who was the Son of God became the Son of Man, that [humanity] having been taken into the Word, and receiving the adoption, might become the children of God. For by no other means could we have attained to incorruptibility and immortality, unless we had been united to incorruptibility and immortality. But how could we be joined to incorruptibility

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Gross, 125.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, III, XIX, 1, 448.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, XXIII, 1, 494.

and immortality, unless, first, incorruptibility and immortality had become that which we also are, so that the corruptible might be swallowed up by incorruptibility, and the mortal by immortality, that we might receive the adoption of sons[daughters]?⁷⁹

Note that Irenaeus uses the “exchange formula” in the above text. Russell argues that this merely signifies “an exchange of properties, not the establishment of an identity of essence.”⁸⁰ The Incarnation makes it possible for human nature to share in divine nature without admixture or confusion. Russell observes that according to Irenaeus, “the Incarnation was a true union of God with [humankind], of created with uncreated.”⁸¹ Further, the Incarnation restores human nature to immortality and incorruptibility by its intimate contact with the Word.

Irenaeus sees in the Person of Christ, the recapitulation of all of humanity. He is the One who restores immortality and the state of divine likeness lost to sin.⁸²

...The Son of God...became incarnate, and was made human, He commenced afresh⁸³ the long line of human beings, and furnished us, in a brief, comprehensive manner, with salvation; so that what we had lost in Adam—namely, to be according to the image and likeness of God—that we might recover in Christ Jesus.⁸⁴

Gross’ findings conclude that Irenaeus often treats image and likeness as synonymous characteristics in humankind. At other times, he differentiates between them, suggesting that the image is found in the body.⁸⁵ This thinking supports his belief that the image of God is first of all realized in the body. Therefore, the human person is called to be the

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, III, XIX, 1, 448.

⁸⁰ Russell, 108.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² Gross, 151.

⁸³ Gross offers a translation for the phrase, “He commenced afresh “ with “He recapitulated in Himself” in his text, *The Divinisation of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, 151.

⁸⁴ Irenaeus of Lyons, III, XVIII, 1, 446.

⁸⁵ Gross, 120-121.

image of the Incarnate Son of God.⁸⁶ Irenaeus claims that the image and likeness given to humanity was lost by Adam. Adam, having succumbed to Satan's promise "that they should be as gods,"⁸⁷ suffered captivity to death and condemnation by his disobedience.⁸⁸ This image and likeness is recovered in Christ who comes to save "His own handiwork,"⁸⁹ "the lost sheep"⁹⁰ who were "created after His image and likeness"⁹¹ in the economy of salvation.⁹²

For if [humankind], who had been created by God that [they] might live, after losing life, through being injured by the serpent that had corrupted [them], should not any more return to life, but should be utterly [and forever] abandoned to death, God would [in that case] have been conquered, and the wickedness of the serpent would have prevailed over the will of God.⁹³

But God's plan for His created order will not be conquered. The New Adam, the Incarnate Word, conquers sin and death by his own death and resurrection, thus restoring human nature in the image and likeness of God, with the capacity for immortality.

Irenaeus teaches that the whole of the human person is created in the image and likeness of God. He argues, "...for the perfect [human person] consists in the commingling and the union of the soul receiving the Spirit of the Father, and the admixture of that fleshly nature which was moulded after the image of God."⁹⁴ Having received the Spirit of God, they are "perfect"⁹⁵ and "spiritual."⁹⁶ According to Irenaeus,

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 455-456.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, III, XXIII, 1, 455.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 455.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, IV, VI, 1, 531.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

perfection comes to those who live in the Spirit. As Gross notes, this does not mean “an absolute perfection,”⁹⁷ but that humankind receives “...a certain portion of His Spirit, tending towards perfection, [that prepares] [them] for incorruption, [and]... little by little [makes them] accustomed to receive and bear God...”⁹⁸ Through the sanctifying and transforming work of the Holy Spirit, the human person is transformed into the likeness of God.⁹⁹ By virtue of the Incarnation of the Word, human nature is “swallowed up” in divine nature¹⁰⁰ and presented to the Father in Christ’s Person.¹⁰¹ Deification of both body and soul take place through the redemptive acts of Christ.¹⁰²

...As the Head rose from the dead, so also the remaining part of the body—[namely, the body] of every [person] who is found in life—when the time is fulfilled of that condemnation which existed by reason of disobedience, may arise, blended together and strengthened through means of joints and bands by the increase of God, each of the members having its own proper and fit position in the body...¹⁰³

With the introduction of the concept of physical deification, Irenaeus begins a new phase in the development of the doctrine of *theosis* that will reach its peak in the fourth century.

Perfection of the human person and [his/her] eventual union with God is also dependent upon the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The patriarch of Lyons describes how the deifying role of the Holy Spirit enables physical deification, the bestowal of created grace, the transformation of human nature and human participation in divine glory.¹⁰⁴

The Holy Spirit, he claims, lives in the spiritual person in body and soul.¹⁰⁵ He is the

⁹⁷ Gross, 129.

⁹⁸ Irenaeus of Lyons, V, VIII, 533.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, IV, XXVI, 1, 497.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, III, XIX, 3, 449.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² Gross, 125.

¹⁰³ Irenaeus of Lyons, III, XIX, 3, 449.

¹⁰⁴ Russell, 100-101.

¹⁰⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, V, VIII, 2, 534.

Spirit who brings “newness of life”¹⁰⁶ and purifies the human person, raising [him/her] to life with God.¹⁰⁷ As for created things, the bishop of Lyons testifies that all creation is called into being by God and “endure[s] as long as God wills.”¹⁰⁸ Irenaeus certifies that life originates in God, who alone, through grace, wills to preserve it. He writes, “For life does not arise from us, nor from our own nature; but it is bestowed according to the grace of God.”¹⁰⁹ Worthy and grateful reception of the life bestowed by God shall merit “length of days for ever and ever.” Likewise, those who reject the gift of life ungratefully are deprived of eternal life.¹¹⁰ In this way, Irenaeus stresses the importance of human cooperation with grace, i.e., the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit within, who sanctifies and perfects those who cooperate with His grace.

The Spirit bestows created grace on those who receive Him. Created grace has the power to transform the human person, making [him/her] like God.¹¹¹ Added to human nature, created grace produces a divine likeness in those who cooperate with its action within them. This teaching counters the belief of the Gnostics who claim that it is only possible for the pneumatics as “an exclusive privilege”¹¹² to share in the divine likeness. The Gnostics conceived of the ὁμοίωσις (similitude) as the divine seed implanted in the pneumatic as a gift of nature which could never be lost.¹¹³ Irenaeus’

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, V, IX, 3, 535.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, V, IX, 2, 535.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, II, XXXIV, 3, 411.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 411-412.

¹¹¹ Gross, 129.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 131.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

teaching asserts that divine likeness is possible because of humanity's creation "in the image" of God and the presence of the Spirit at work through grace.¹¹⁴

The patriarch attributes the transformation of the human person to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. He argues that the human person was not created at the beginning as perfect. Rather, like infants who are nourished with milk, human persons must first become accustomed to the nourishment of the food and drink of the *Logos*.

...It was possible for God Himself to have made [humans] perfect from the first, but [they] could not receive this [perfection]...And for this cause our Lord...came to us, not as He might have come, but as we were capable of beholding Him...He might easily have come to us in His immortal glory, but in that case we could never have endured the greatness of the glory...He, who was the perfect bread of the Father, offered Himself to us...from the breast of his flesh...to become accustomed to eat and drink the Word of God [that we] may be able ...to contain in ourselves the Bread of immortality, which is the Spirit of the Father.¹¹⁵

Irenaeus suggests that the coming of Christ as fully human indicates that human nature would not have been able to endure the glory of the divinity of the *Logos*. Therefore, human nature was not yet perfected. Christ gives himself as food and drink to humanity in order that humanity might be nurtured and fortified by Him as their divine food. Then, raised to perfection, humanity is made ready to participate in divine glory, in *theosis*.

The Spirit of God continues the perfecting and deifying work of the *Logos*.

Irenaeus notes, "...for those upon whom the apostles laid hands received the Holy Spirit, who is the food of life [eternal]..."¹¹⁶ As the Spirit of the Father rests upon the human person, [he/she] is able to "receive a faculty of the Uncreated, through the gratuitous bestowal of eternal existence upon [him/her] by God."¹¹⁷ Thus, having been called by

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Irenaeus of Lyons, IV, XXXVIII, 1, 521.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, XXXVIII, 2, 521.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, IV, XXXVIII, 3, 521.

God to perfection, humankind is provided with the means to achieve [his/her] vocation through the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit of God. His grace perfects and sanctifies humanity, whose nature has been restored in Christ, to be transformed into the image and likeness of God.¹¹⁸ This trinitarian view is expressed by Irenaeus in the following text:

The Father planning everything well and giving His commands, the Son carrying these into execution and performing the work of creating, and the Spirit, nourishing and increasing [what is made], but [human persons] making progress day by day, and ascending towards the perfect, that is, approximating to the uncreated One.¹¹⁹

For Irenaeus, humanity's call to *theosis* is at the heart of the economy of God. He demonstrates that God's eternal plan for His creation is accomplished in and through the deifying and sanctifying mission of the Incarnate *Logos* and the grace of the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus' claim that humanity is deified in body and soul is supported by the Incarnation of the Son of God, who, by assuming human flesh, deifies it for all humanity. Aided by the indwelling of the Spirit of God and fed on the heavenly food of Christ, humanity is led to perfection in the image and likeness of God. The patriarch teaches that this growth in perfection is a gradual process so that after the resurrection of the dead, those who have cooperated with the grace of the Spirit, will be made ready to participate in divine glory as incorruptible and immortal.¹²⁰

Theosis and the Sacraments

How does Irenaeus account for the gap that exists between the Uncreated God and created humanity? As Russell notes, historically, the Incarnation has already bridged that distance.¹²¹ On a personal level, the human person has the capacity to

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ Gross, 130

¹²¹ Russell, 107.

progress toward the fullness of perfection through Baptism and Eucharist. The waters of Baptism are sanctifying and justifying. As heirs to Adam, “we have borne the image of him who is of the earth,”¹²² therefore, “flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God.” (1Cor 15:49)¹²³ However, humanity also bears “the image of Him who is from heaven,” having been washed in the waters of Baptism, professing faith in the Lord Jesus’ name and receiving the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus notes that the waters of Baptism restore human nature to right relationship with God. In Baptism, the believer is made holy in Christ through the grace of the Holy Spirit. He writes, “But ye have been washed, but ye have been sanctified...but ye have been justified in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God.”¹²⁴ Baptism is linked to divine adoption. Irenaeus posits that the disobedience of Adam cast humanity “off from immortality.”¹²⁵ However, by receiving the Son of God, humanity “obtained mercy, receiving through [Him] that adoption which is [accomplished] by Himself.”¹²⁶ Russell claims that it is only through divine adoption that humankind has the capacity to become deified “because it relates them by participation to the source of life.”¹²⁷ Having regained the divine likeness through adoption, humanity begins to progress towards deification,¹²⁸ thus bridging the gap that separated them from God.

¹²² Irenaeus of Lyons, V, XI, 2, 537.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, III, XX, 2, 450.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, III, XX, 2, 450.

¹²⁷ Russell, 109.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

According to Russell, Irenaeus posits that the life received at Baptism is nourished and sustained through reception of the Eucharist.¹²⁹ Irenaeus argues that when human flesh receives the Bread of Life, its corruptible nature becomes incorruptible and immortal so as to be resurrected “to the glory of God.”¹³⁰ Irenaeus notes the deifying power of the Word of God:

For as the bread, which is produced from the earth, when it receives the invocation of God, is no longer common bread, but the Eucharist, consisting of two realities, earthly and heavenly; so also our bodies, when they receive the Eucharist, are no longer corruptible, having the hope of resurrection to eternity.¹³¹

According to Irenaeus, the Eucharist brings incorruptibility and immortality to human flesh as earthly realities are drawn into the heavenly. United to the body of Christ, humanity shares in His divinity in the same fashion as earthly bread is changed by the sacerdotal invocation of Christ’s presence.

Along with Baptism and Eucharist, Irenaeus posits the need for right moral behavior to maintain new life in the Spirit of God, and to attain divine likeness.¹³² He exhorts the faithful to keep the “temple,” i.e., the flesh, clean so “that the Spirit of God may take delight therein.”¹³³ Right moral behavior is the new life in the Holy Spirit. According to the patriarch, those who live by faith and purity,¹³⁴ reflect on the Word of

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, V, II, 3, 528.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, IV, XVIII, 5, 486.

¹³² Russell, 109.

¹³³ Irenaeus of Lyons, V, IX, 4, 535.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, V, IX, 3, 535.

God,¹³⁵ and perform charitable deeds,¹³⁶ are those who live in the Spirit as inheritors of the Kingdom of God.¹³⁷

Without using deification language, Irenaeus proffers a theological interpretation of the doctrine of *theosis* that laid the groundwork for the Fathers of the fourth century. His exposition of the role of the Incarnate Son, including his death and resurrection, expands the previously held belief that deification was only possible after physical death. His teaching that the Holy Spirit is the agent of deification for the body and soul is a concept that was totally refuted by the Gnostics. Highlighting the deifying role of the Holy Spirit, he argues that created grace, given by the Spirit, enables the natural life of humankind to be transformed into supranatural life. The Spirit of God prepares humanity to behold God and participate in His glory. He does this in the Son of God who leads humanity to the Father where they receive eternal life and incorruption in the sight of God.¹³⁸ “For as those who see the light are within the light, and partake of its brilliancy; even so, those who see God are in God, and receive His splendour.”¹³⁹ Irenaeus assures the believer that God’s loving power, channeled through the Holy Spirit, will lead His People on their journey through this life as they return to the vision of His glory in the age of the Kingdom. Having been restored by the Incarnation and sanctified by the grace of the Holy Spirit, those who have been found worthy after the resurrection, will be made sharers in the splendor of God’s glory¹⁴⁰ to their ultimate deification. Clearly, Irenaeus’

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, V, IX, 1, 534.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, V, VIII, 4, 534.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, V, IX, 5, 535.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, IV, XX, 5, 489.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, V, VII, 2, 533.

work paved the way for a more elaborate theological development of the doctrine of *theosis* to be accomplished by the Fathers of the fourth century.

Saint Athanasius

In the fourth century, Saint Athanasius made notable advancements in the synthesis of the doctrine of *theosis*.¹⁴¹ When Athanasius became bishop of Alexandria in 328 A.D., he inherited a Church that was divided over many issues and personal conflicts. He, himself, suffered moral accusations and personal exile.¹⁴² In his introductory remarks in the *Defense Against the Arians*, Athanasius addresses these attacks:

I supposed that after so many proofs of my innocence...my enemies would have condemned themselves for their false accusations of others. But...they...persist in their slanderous reports against me...¹⁴³

Included among the most pressing of matters was the teaching of Arius, an Alexandrian priest “who asserted that God’s Son did not always exist. Consequently, He was not divine by nature, but only the first among creatures.”¹⁴⁴ As a result of the various internal divisions within his jurisdiction, especially the Arian heresy, Athanasius focused on a christological undertaking that led to a more elaborate theological development of *theosis*.¹⁴⁵ In fact, Athanasius employs “the technical terms of deification” in more instances than the previous Fathers.¹⁴⁶ Christian deification is first cited in *Contra Gentes—De Incarnatione*, an early two-part apology. It was during his exile to Rome,

¹⁴¹ Gross, 163.

¹⁴² Russell, 164-166.

¹⁴³ St. Athanasius, *Defense Against the Arians*, Introduction, 1, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 100.

¹⁴⁴ *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “Arianism,” by Gerald O’Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J.

¹⁴⁵ Russell, 167.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

however, that Athanasius wrote *Orations Against the Arians* and *The First Epistle to Serapion*, which stress deification in a more pronounced manner, especially as a defense against the Arians.¹⁴⁷

Deification language is first used by Athanasius in a christological construct in *De Incarnatione*, which was to form his argument against the Arians:

For He was made man that we might be made god: and He manifested Himself by a body that we might receive the idea of the unseen Father; and He endured the insolence of [humans] that we might inherit immortality. For while He Himself was in no way injured, being impassable and incorruptible and very Word and God, [persons] who were suffering, and for whose sakes He endured all this, He maintained and preserved in His own impassibility.¹⁴⁸

Athanasius' teaching affirms that the purpose of the Incarnation of the Son was for the deification of humanity. Christ's victory over death merits immortality for human nature in spite of bodily death.

Athanasius' approach to deification, according to Russell, is more realistic than ethical. Ontological deification, as noted previously, affirms the human capacity to participate in divine life as a result of the Incarnation of the *Logos* and the reception of Baptism. Ethical deification occurs when the human person reaches a purity of the body through the practice of virtue. The "*theophoroumenos*" or "perfected one" enjoys eternal beatitude after death. Therefore, in Russell's view, Athanasius' approach to deification can be categorized more as the realistic model than the ethical one.¹⁴⁹ Noteworthy is the patriarch's placement of *theosis* language in passages that stress the "communication of divine life by the *Logos*." Appropriated by the sacraments, this "physical redemption"

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 167-170.

¹⁴⁸ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54, 3, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 65.

¹⁴⁹ Russell, 184-187.

gives a sacramental character to Athanasius treatment of deification and suggests that reception of the sacraments enables participation in divine life.¹⁵⁰

The Divinity of the Son of God

Athanasius premised his work with the assertion that the Incarnate Son must be truly God, Eternal and Uncreated, in order to deify the human race.¹⁵¹ “For, whereas the Father always is, so what is proper to His essence must always be; and this is His Word and His Wisdom.”¹⁵² Athanasius argues that divine generation is not to be compared to human generation, nor is it to imply passion.¹⁵³

But with God this cannot be; for He is not composed of parts, but being impassible and simple, He is impassibly and indivisibly Father of the Son...For the Word of God is His Son, and the Son is the Father’s Word and Wisdom; and Word and Wisdom is neither creature nor part of Him whose Word He is, nor an offspring passibly begotten.¹⁵⁴

The Son of God is eternally begotten. He is not son to the Father in the sense that offspring are sons to created human beings. God is not divisible. The Son, who is proper to God’s essence as is Word and Wisdom, is eternally begotten and uncreated.

Athanasius concurs with Irenaeus that “[The *Logos*] became human in order that [humankind] might be divinized.”¹⁵⁵ The goal of the Incarnation he notes, is the deification of humanity.¹⁵⁶

...Therefore, He did not receive in reward the name of the Son of God, but rather He Himself has made us sons [and daughters] of the Father, and deified [humanity] by becoming Himself [human]. Therefore, He was not [human], and then became God,

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 185.

¹⁵¹ Gross, 166.

¹⁵² St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, I, VIII, 29, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 324.

¹⁵³ Ibid., I, VIII, 28, 322.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word* 54 (25:192b); quoted in Gross, 166.

¹⁵⁶ Gross, 167.

but He was God, and then became [human], and that to deify us.¹⁵⁷

The bishop of Alexandria insists on the divinity of the Son as truly God. It was a critical factor in his argument against the Arians to prove that human nature alone could not deify other humans. The principle of divinization is intrinsic to the essence of the Incarnate *Logos*. Hence, the divine nature of Christ penetrates humanity with divine life, offering immortality and a share in divine inheritance.¹⁵⁸

He is the Father's Wisdom and Word of which all things partake. It follows that He, being the deifying and enlightening power of the Father, in which all things are deified and quickened, is not alien in essence from the Father, but coessential. For by partaking of Him, we partake of the Father; because...the Word is the Father's own.¹⁵⁹

Only a co-eternal, uncreated, divine nature has the power and authority to deify human nature. Athanasius argues that the *Logos* of God is of the same essence of the Father. To receive the Son is to receive the Father, who is one with Him. Gross applauds Athanasius for his theological contribution to physical deification that argues the deifying power of the indwelling of the Son of God in human nature.¹⁶⁰

Athanasius believes that intimate contact with human nature by the divine *Logos* not only divinizes, it also brings healing and immortality.¹⁶¹ According to Gross, Athanasius posits that the union of the two natures in Christ heals human nature of its mortality due to sin. Before Christ, sin and corruption remained with humanity bringing death to all human nature.¹⁶² He writes:

¹⁵⁷ St. Athanasius, *Ibid.*, I, XI, 38-39, 329.

¹⁵⁸ Gross, 168-169.

¹⁵⁹ St. Athanasius, *Councils of Ariminum and Seleucia*, III, 51, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1991), 477.

¹⁶⁰ Gross, 167.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

But now the Word having become [human] and having appropriated what pertains to the flesh, no longer do these things touch the body, because of the Word who has come in it, but they are destroyed by Him, and henceforth [human persons] no longer remain sinners and dead according to their proper affections, but having risen according to the Word's power, they abide ever immortal and incorruptible.¹⁶³

Christ's taking on of the flesh destroys the power of death over human nature, exalting the body and constituting its deification. By means of the assumption of human flesh by the *Logos*, human nature is restored and reinstated into incorruptibility and immortality.

Athanasius adds that Christ's Incarnation does not "diminish"¹⁶⁴ Him as Word. He clearly defines the "distance and difference"¹⁶⁵ between the Son of God and human creatures. He writes, "The Word did not cease to become God when He became [human]."¹⁶⁶ Athanasius insists that the Word shares the same divine nature as the Father, the nature in which humanity is called to share.¹⁶⁷ In the person of Christ, both natures are held together without confusion or diminishment.

The patriarch also submits that the Incarnation causes a type of second creation of humankind by God from within, i.e., a deification of the entire human race. As Russell observes:

The first is the deification of the flesh by the *Logos* in the Incarnation: the *Logos* deified that which he put on; he made the body immortal; he renewed and exalted human nature. The second is the deiification of [humankind] by the Son.¹⁶⁸

The second aspect of deification originates in the first. All humankind possesses a fleshy nature. When Christ assumed human flesh in the Incarnation, all human flesh was deified through Him. The deification of all humanity constitutes the second phase of Athanasius'

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁴ Russell, 171.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 174.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁷ St. Athanasius, III, XXV, 21, 405.

¹⁶⁸ Russell, 177.

theory of deification.¹⁶⁹ This does not mean to suggest, however, that individuals need not appropriate their salvation.¹⁷⁰ It merely highlights the truth that all of humankind has access to eternal life by virtue of the Incarnation. In Athanasius' words, "For as the Lord, putting on the body, became [human], so we [humans] are deified by the Word as being taken to Him through His flesh, and henceforth inherit life everlasting."¹⁷¹ Gross submits that in Athanasius' view, human nature is an overarching term to define the essence of all human beings as identical. He also points out that the patriarch did not distinguish between substance and person. Therefore, in Gross' view, Athanasius could not clearly connect the Incarnation to an automatic deification of the individual. He does, however, address individual divinization in terms of the combined efforts of Christ, the Holy Spirit and the individual.¹⁷²

The Deifying Role of the Holy Spirit

In addition to Athanasius' insights on the role of the Incarnate Son of God, like Irenaeus, he recognizes the deifying role of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷³ In the same fashion that the patriarch set out to prove the divinity of the Son, he establishes the divinity of the Holy Spirit. He writes in the *First Letter to Serapion*:

If, by participation in the Spirit, we become 'partakers of divine nature,' (2 Pet 1:4) it would be insane to say that the Spirit belongs to created nature and not to God. For that is why those in whom He comes to dwell are those who are deified...And if He deifies there is no doubt that his nature is of God.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁰ Russell, 172-173.

¹⁷¹ St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, III, XXVI, 34, 413.

¹⁷² Gross, 168-169.

¹⁷³ Gross, 167.

¹⁷⁴ St. Athanasius, *First Letter to Serapion*, I, 25, *Patrologia Graeca* 26. 589B; quoted in Russell, 174-175.

Athanasius bases his belief in the deifying role of the Holy Spirit on his argument of the “one sanctification”...”from the Father by the Son in the Holy Spirit.”¹⁷⁵ According to Gross, the divinizing role of the Holy Spirit in regards to humankind is identical to His role in the Incarnation of the *Logos*.¹⁷⁶ Thus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, human nature is united to the divine nature of the Son of God in the flesh of Mary. At the same time, humanity and all creation are united to divinity through the Incarnate *Logos*.¹⁷⁷ Another example of the Spirit’s divinizing action is found in the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan. Athanasius writes, “it is very plain that the Spirit’s descent on Him in [the] Jordan was a descent upon us, because of His bearing our body...”¹⁷⁸ The human body of the Incarnate Son receives the Holy Spirit at his Baptism in order that the Spirit may come to dwell in humanity. The Alexandrian bishop concludes that those who share in the sanctifying and deifying Holy Spirit do so in conjunction with the deifying role of the Incarnate Son. As Gross observes, Athanasius puts forward his theory that the deification of humanity and, indeed, all creation, is the Trinitarian gift that originates in the Father and is established in the Son by the power of the Holy Spirit.¹⁷⁹

Divine Acts of Creation and Adoption¹⁸⁰

Athanasius makes the distinction between the act of the creation of humankind and the act of divine adoption. This conclusion is based on the scripture passage, “Has

¹⁷⁵ St. Athanasius, *First Letter to Serapion*, I, 20, *Patrologia Graeca* 26, 577c; quoted in Gross, 170.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, I, XII, 46-47, 333.

¹⁷⁹ Gross, 171.

¹⁸⁰ Gross, 164.

not one and the same God created us? Is there not one and the same Father for us all?”

(Mal 2:10)¹⁸¹ Athanasius clarifies this point for the sake of the Arians:¹⁸²

...For first he puts ‘created,’ next ‘Father’ to shew, as the other writers, that from the beginning we were created by nature, and God is our Creator through the Word; but afterwards we were made sons [and daughters], and thenceforward God the Creator becomes our Father also.¹⁸³

In Gross’ view, the Athanasian distinction of the two acts of creation and adoption is the difference between the nature of the human person and grace.¹⁸⁴ The natural condition of the human person is that of a creature who has no life apart from the *Logos*.¹⁸⁵ He does believe that this being is endowed with a “spiritual and immortal soul, endowed with reason and freedom,”¹⁸⁶ gifts that are natural to human nature. However, unlike many of the earlier Fathers of the Church, Athanasius did not recognize the εἰκών (image) in the human soul, nor did he make the distinction with the “superior, divine likeness (ὁμοίωσις).”¹⁸⁷ According to Gross, his views on human nature prevented him from attributing the divine likeness in humanity to anything but the “indwelling of the *Logos*,”¹⁸⁸ which he termed “grace.”¹⁸⁹ He posits that the *Logos*, “by His substantial presence” transfigured Adam’s soul into His own image, granting him “divine filiation, incorruptibility and a happy life in intimacy with God.”¹⁹⁰ Gross concludes that for

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ Saint Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, XXI, 59, 380.

¹⁸⁴ Gross, 164-165.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

Athanasius, the grace of the *Logos* in the soul of Adam transforms him into the image of the Son.

Adam's transgression forfeited the relationship of intimacy with God and denied humankind the capacity for immortality and incorruptibility.¹⁹¹ In the following text, Athanasius reveals his conviction that divine filiation, which was not granted to humanity at their creation, is the result of God's intervention through grace:

... 'I begat and exalted children, and they rebelled against Me,' And of course since they were not sons [and daughters] by nature, therefore when they altered, the Spirit was taken away and they were disinherited.¹⁹²

As Gross observes, Athanasius views the disobedience of Adam as a willful dismissal of the *Logos* and a break in the relationship. Having lost the intimacy of the indwelling of the *Logos*, humankind was now susceptible to death and corruption as the consequences of sin.¹⁹³

The bishop of Alexandria notes that, in spite of their transgression, God will restore humanity's adoption, "on their repentance that God who thus at the beginning gave them grace, will receive them, and give light, and call them sons [and daughters] again."¹⁹⁴ What is needed to restore humanity's adoption is that an "unalterable" One might come so that "[humankind] might have the immutability of the righteousness of the Word as an image and type for virtue."¹⁹⁵ By assuming flesh, the Word would destroy sin, establish divine filiation, and recreate humanity in the divine image.¹⁹⁶ Once the

¹⁹¹ Gross, 166.

¹⁹² St. Athanasius, *ibid.*

¹⁹³ Gross, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ St. Athanasius, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ St. Athanasius, I, XII, 51, 336.

¹⁹⁶ Gross, 166.

image has been restored, Christ will present humankind to the Father in the perfected state of deification: As Athanasius writes:

[Humankind] then is perfected in Him and restored, as it was made at the beginning, nay, with greater grace. For, on rising from the dead, we shall no longer fear death, but shall ever reign in Christ in the heavens.¹⁹⁷

Clearly, Athanasius assigns the restoration of the image of divine likeness in humanity to the Incarnate *Logos*. But, as Gross suggests, Christ brings a grace of much greater magnitude in the grace of divinization.¹⁹⁸

Athanasius demonstrates the redemptive and deifying work of the Incarnate Word who appropriates Himself as “an image and type for virtue.”¹⁹⁹ In response to the Arian accusation that Christ is an ordinary man needing to mature and progress, he submits this passage from Luke’s gospel, “And Jesus advanced in wisdom and stature, and in grace with God and [humankind].” (Lk 2:52) Athanasius interprets the questions of the Arians as follows: “How then does He who to others supplies perfection, Himself advance later than they... How did Wisdom advance in wisdom... or how did He who to others gives grace...how did He advance in grace?”²⁰⁰ The bishop of Alexandria argues that the human life of Christ continues to complete the redemptive and deifying work of the Incarnation throughout the stages of human life.²⁰¹ Humanity possesses by nature the capacity “of reaching forward and advancing in virtue.”²⁰² Athanasius calls to mind how even those human persons whom one would esteem to be worthy in the sight of God, (e.g., Enoch, Moses, Isaac, and the Apostle, Paul) strove to grow in perfection day by

¹⁹⁷ St. Athanasius, II, XXI, 67, 385.

¹⁹⁸ Gross, 166.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, I, XII, 51, 336.

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, III, XXVIII, 51, 421.

²⁰¹ Gross, 171.

²⁰² St. Athanasius, III, XXVIII, 52, 422.

day.²⁰³ He adds that the Son of God has no need to progress “for all things advance by looking at Him.”²⁰⁴

To [humankind] then, belongs advance; but the Son of God, since He could not advance, being perfect in the Father, humbled Himself for us, that in His humbling we on the other hand might be able to increase. And our increase is no other than the renouncing things sensible and coming to the Word Himself.²⁰⁵

The flesh of the Word of God advanced in stature, and in the body’s advancing, the manifestation of His divinity increased with the revelation of His Godhead. His grace as a human increased before [humankind]. As He grew into manhood, His manhood advanced in wisdom, He who is Wisdom Itself. All of this, claims Athanasius, constitutes “the deifying grace imparted from Wisdom to [humans].”²⁰⁶ In his view, humankind is to advance in the image of the Person of Christ and in relationship with Him.²⁰⁷

The Bishop sees Christ as the image of the virtuous life. He submits that one must continuously practice the life of “virtue and perfection”²⁰⁸ modeled by Him. He warns that a person’s wickedness causes [him/her] to “fall from the Spirit”²⁰⁹ which means [he/she] is “no longer in God.”²¹⁰ He urges the Christian to mold [himself/herself] to the Incarnate Christ. Like Christ, the Christian must model mercy, compassion, humility and love.²¹¹ Participation in Christ, the Archetype of virtue in whom the

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, III, XXVIII, 52, 422.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁸ Gross, 172.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, III, XXV, 25, 407.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹¹ St. Athanasius, III, XXV, 20-21, 405.

fullness of redemption and deification is realized, is a participation in the divine perfection that fashions the Christian into a nature worthy of divine adoption.

Unfinished Areas of Doctrinal Development

In Russell's view, several aspects of Athanasius' teaching on the doctrine of deification are lacking.²¹² The first of these suggests that Athanasius did not satisfactorily treat physical deification because of his emphasis on the body of Christ to the exclusion of his soul. This is due, in part, to his anthropology that does not distinguish between image and likeness in humanity. Athanasius concerns himself with the image of humankind made in the image of the *Logos*. In Adam's original state, his soul contemplated the divine. As Russell suggests, the Fall of Adam is the result of the soul turning away from contemplating God and entertaining its own desires. Consequently, he adds, the soul was imprisoned in the bodily pleasures.²¹³ Another argument surrounds the fact that Athanasius placed more emphasis on the "loss of immortality"²¹⁴ with little regard for the "loss of contemplation."²¹⁵ In any case, Russell contends that the lack of development of the concept of the soul makes it difficult for Athanasius to relate virtuous living to *theosis*.²¹⁶ The second issue that needs clarification in Russell's view is that of the compatibility of Athanasian soteriology with his ontology.²¹⁷ How does the patriarch demonstrate that created humankind is able to participate in divinity? Russell notes that this is particularly problematic in that "the

²¹² Russell, 178.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 179.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 180.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 188.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 179.

participant is by definition different from the participated.”²¹⁸ Athanasius argues that by participation in the deified body of the *Logos*, humanity participates in his divinity that communicates the Godhead.²¹⁹ Therefore, union with the *Logos* demands Baptism. Athanasius clearly argues the need for “the holy laver”²²⁰ of Baptism whereby humankind is brought into fellowship with the Creator.²²¹ Baptism is the means whereby participation in the life of the Holy Spirit given by the Son is appropriated to individual believers. The Spirit makes possible the deification brought by the “deifying body of the Word.”²²² Russell states, “Another way of putting it is to say that the Son is life-in-itself...the Spirit is life-giving...and the faithful are made-alive.”²²³ Athanasius posits that Baptism is a participation in the life of the Trinity of Persons: “so also when Baptism is given, whom the Father baptizes, [him/her] the Son baptizes; and whom the Son baptizes, [he/she] is consecrated in the Holy Ghost.”²²⁴ The divinity of the Holy Spirit enables humankind to partake of the divine nature of Christ. In this way, human nature is no longer subject to death and corruption, but is transformed by the *Logos* allowing humanity to become partakers of divinity.²²⁵

As to the deifying role of the Eucharist, Athanasius writes: “And we are deified not by partaking of the body of some man, but by receiving the Body of the Word

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 181.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

²²⁰ St. Athanasius, II, XVIII, 41, 370.

²²¹ *Ibid.*

²²² Russell, 177.

²²³ *Ibid.*, 183.

²²⁴ St. Athanasius, *Four Discourses Against the Arians*, II, XVIII, 41, 370.

²²⁵ Russell, 186.

Himself.”²²⁶ The deified flesh of the *Logos* is “divine food,”²²⁷ the nourishment for the soul.²²⁸ Athanasius theory of physical deification is grounded in the belief that divine life is communicated to humanity by the deified flesh of the *Logos*. Those who unite themselves to Him in the sacraments, therefore, are deified.²²⁹ Russell observes the sacramental character of deification that Athanasius introduces to the development of the doctrine. He adds that St. Cyril of Alexandria elaborates on this theme in the following century.²³⁰

St. Athanasius upholds the belief that deification begins in this life and is fulfilled in heaven.²³¹ With the second coming of Christ and the resurrection of the body, he argues that those who are righteous will be reunited with their immortal bodies. Having been united to Christ, they will be made partakers of the divine nature of the Trinity of Persons. In the glorious vision of God, *theosis* will reach its fulfillment.²³²

St. Athanasius formulates his theory of deification within the context of his arguments against the Arians and the controversy over the divinity of the Son of God.²³³ As Russell notes, this gives his work a more soteriological character than an ethical one. In his view, Christ is the Son of God, of the same essence of the Father, because of his ability to deify humankind.²³⁴ By assuming human nature, Christ deifies and transforms it to be able to participate in divine nature. This comes as a result of participation in the

²²⁶ St. Athanasius, *Festal Letters*, LXI, 2, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. IV (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1919), 578-579.

²²⁷ St. Athanasius, *Festal Letters*, I, 7, 508.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Russell, 185.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 187.

²³² Gross, 174-175.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 163.

²³⁴ Russell, 187.

flesh of the Divine *Logos* as encountered in the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist. Athanasius also accounts for the deifying role of the Holy Spirit and argues His divinity in the same manner that he argued the divinity of the Son. Union with the Son effected by the Spirit unites humanity to the divine Trinity, and, by grace, makes them adopted sons and daughters of God. Thus, as their divine inheritance, they are promised immortality, incorruptibility, and eternal participation in the life of the Trinity.²³⁵

Athanasius' theological contributions to *theosis* prepare the way for the developments of St. Gregory of Nyssa and the continuing formulation of the doctrinal synthesis in the fourth century.

St. Gregory of Nyssa

Gregory of Nyssa, following the lead of St. Athanasius, is hailed by Gross as “the witness *par excellence* of the Greek doctrine of *theosis*.”²³⁶ Meyendorff considers him to be one of the great “Christian mystics who [has succeeded] in expressing...the Christian mystery of the Incarnation and of salvation in Jesus Christ.”²³⁷ The doctrine of *theosis* reaches its peak in Gregory's writings and is crucial in the development of his soteriology and anthropology.²³⁸ According to Gross, Gregory's development of the doctrine centered on the themes of the transcendence of God, the inaccessibility of God, the goodness of God, God's call to humankind to share in His glory, and the original state of humanity.²³⁹ The following section will explore how Gregory developed these themes relative to *theosis*. It will also include his thoughts on the role of the Incarnation,

²³⁵ Gross, 173.

²³⁶ Gross, 176.

²³⁷ John Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 40.

²³⁸ Gross, 188-189.

²³⁹ Gross, 176-177.

Baptism and Eucharist in the doctrinal synthesis. Excerpts from Gregory's work, *La Vie de Moïse* (*The Life of Moses*) serve to articulate these themes in the patriarch's own words.

The Transcendence of God

Like Philo and Origen before him, the youngest of the Cappadocians found expression for the notion of participation in God's life in the ascent of Moses to Mt. Sinai. Analogous to the spiritual ascent of the Christian, it becomes an image of the inaccessibility and unknowability of the Eternal, Invisible God who calls humankind into relationship in the mystery of darkness.²⁴⁰

Mais que signifient d'autre part l'entrée de Moïse dans la ténèbre et la vision que dans celle-ci eut de Dieu?...l'esprit, dans sa marche en avant, parvient, par une application toujours plus grande et plus parfaite, à comprendre ce que c'est la connaissance des réalités et s'approche davantage de la contemplation, plus il voit que la nature divine est invisible.²⁴¹ Ayant laissé toutes les apparences, non seulement ce que perçoivent les sens, mais ce que l'intelligence croit voir, il tend toujours plus vers l'intérieur jusqu'à ce qu'il pénètre, par l'effort de l'esprit, jusqu'à l'invisible et à l'inconnaissable et que là il voie Dieu. C'est en cela que consiste en effet la vraie connaissance de celui qu'il cherche et sa vraie vision, dans le fait de ne pas voir, parce que celui qu'il cherche transcende toute connaissance, séparé de toute part par son incompréhensibilité comme par une ténèbre...²⁴²

What does it mean that Moses entered the darkness and then saw God in it?...But as the mind progresses and through an ever greater and more perfect diligence, comes to apprehend reality, as it approaches more nearly to contemplation, it sees more clearly what of the divine nature is un contemplated...For leaving behind everything that is observed, not only what sense comprehends but also what the intelligence thinks it sees, it keeps on penetrating deeper until by the intelligence's yearning for understanding it gains access to the invisible and the incomprehensible, and there it sees God. This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.²⁴³

²⁴⁰ Meyendorff, 40

²⁴¹ Grégoire de Nysse, *Sources Chrétiennes*, vol. I, 162, *La Vie de Moïse ou Traité de la Perfection en Matière de Vertu*, ed. Henri de Lubac (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1968), 211.

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 212-213.

The mystery of the divine essence poses itself in paradoxical realities. God, whose essence is inaccessible, summons Moses to Him. The Invisible One is perceived in the darkness beyond all that the senses and the mind can grasp. The Unknowable One reveals the profound depths of His unknowability.²⁴⁴

Gregory orients his theological vision of *theosis* from the principle of the utter transcendence of God. According to Gregory, God's transcendence is characterized by the truth that He is Uncreated, unapproachable and inaccessible to created humankind.²⁴⁵ Gregory adds, however, that God chooses to reveal Himself to created humankind in a fashion worthy of their dignity as created in His image. Therefore, Gregory concludes that God's created beings are worthy of "this intimate connection with the Deity."²⁴⁶ In his treatise, *The Great Catechism*, Gregory insists that a "proper conception"²⁴⁷ of God is the governing principle of faith. Therefore, he proposes that God must be conceived with only those attributes that suggest excellence.²⁴⁸ God is "infinite,"²⁴⁹ "Almighty,"²⁵⁰ "eternal, and immortal,"²⁵¹ adds Gregory. In Gross' view, the theme of the transcendence of God permeates Gregory's contribution to the doctrine of *theosis*.²⁵²

²⁴³ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, I, 162, trans. Abraham J. Malherbe and Everett Ferguson (New York: Paulist Press, 1978), 94-95.

²⁴⁴ Meyendorff, 43.

²⁴⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* XVIII, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 496-497.

²⁴⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* XVIII, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 496-497.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 485.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, XX, 491.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, X, 485.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, XX, 491.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, V, 479.

²⁵² Gross, 176.

The patriarch links deification to those who seek to participate in the One who is Good. Gregory describes God's goodness in *La Vie de Moïse*:

Ce qui est Bien au sens premier et proper, dont la bonté est réellement ce qu'implique son essence. Or il a été établi que la vertu n'a pas d'autre limite que le vice. D'autre part nous venons de dire que la Divinité exclut tout contraire. Nous pourrions donc conclure que la nature divine est illimitée est infinie. Mais celui qui recherche la vraie vertu, à quoi participe-t-il, sinon à Dieu, puisque la vertu parfaite est Dieu même. Si par ailleurs les êtres qui connaissent le Beau en soi aspirent à y participer, dès lors que celui-ci est infini, nécessairement le désir de celui qui cherche à y participer sera co-extensif à l'infinie et ne connaîtra pas de repos.²⁵³

The Divine One is himself the Good (in the primary and proper sense of the word), whose nature is goodness. This he is and he is so named, and is known by this nature. Since, then, it has not been demonstrated that there is any limit to virtue except evil, and since the Divine does not admit of an opposite, we hold the divine nature to be unlimited and infinite. Certainly whoever pursues true virtue participates in nothing other than God, because he is himself absolute virtue. Since, then, those who know what is good by nature desire participation in it, and since this good has no limit, the participant's desire itself necessarily has no stopping place but stretches out with the limitless.²⁵⁴

In the above passage, Gregory posits the natural goodness of human nature that desires to share in God's goodness. As Russell notes, in order to share in any attribute of God, one must become that which the attribute suggests. Thus, "in order to approach [God] as Good, one should become good..."²⁵⁵ Gregory submits that God created human persons with the capacity to share in the abundance of His goodness and love.²⁵⁶ He writes:

...It was needful that a certain affinity with the Divine should be mingled with the nature of [humankind], in order that by means of this correspondence it might aim at that which was native to it... Thus, then, it was needful for [humankind], born for the enjoyment of Divine good, to have something in [his/her] nature akin to that in which [he/she] is to participate.²⁵⁷

²⁵³ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, Preface 7, 51.

²⁵⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, Prologue, 7, 31.

²⁵⁵ Russell, 227.

²⁵⁶ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* V, 478.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 478-479.

God's Goodness is manifested in His eternal plan that created beings participate in His divine plenitude. Therefore, from creation, humanity is instilled with divine kinship that seeks divine fulfillment. Created in God's image, the human person has the capacity to share in the attributes of God. According to Russell, participation in God's divine attributes constitutes communion with Him.²⁵⁸

Created in the Image of God

For Gregory, the creation of the human person in God's image is the unique "inherent faculty"²⁵⁹ which disposes [him/her] to the transcendent God whom [he/she] desires. Within this faculty is the recapitulation of all that characterizes God. Thus, the human person possesses an affinity with God that enables participation in God's eternal existence.²⁶⁰ Gregory posits that God's eternal existence is given as the gift of immortality to human nature.²⁶¹ Intelligence and free will are other privileges inherent in the nature of the human person that reflects divine likeness.²⁶² According to Gross, Gregory attributes the privileges of being made in God's image to both the body and soul of humankind.²⁶³

Image in the Soul

According to Gross, Gregory regards the divine likeness in humankind, most like God's own glory and beauty, to be found in the soul: free will and intelligence.²⁶⁴

Being the image and likeness...of the Power which rules all things, [the human person] kept also in the matter of a free-will this likeness to Him whose will is

²⁵⁸ Russell, 227.

²⁵⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, V, 479.

²⁶⁰ Gross, 178.

²⁶¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, V, 479.

²⁶² Gross, 179.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 178-179.

over all. He was enslaved to no outward necessity whatever...²⁶⁵

Without freedom and reason, the human person would not mirror the beauty of its Archetype and simply be enslaved to Him. Some would argue, however, that the present condition of humanity, subject to suffering and death, could not possibly bear divine resemblance. Gregory responds:

How can that nature which is under a yoke and bondage to any kind of necessity be called an image of a Master Being? Was it not, then, most right that that which is in every detail made like the Divine should possess in its nature a self-ruling and independent principle, such as to enable the participation of good to be the reward of its virtue?²⁶⁶

Once again, Gregory refers to deification in terms of participating in the divine attributes. He does acknowledge, however, that imbedded within the human will are the capacity and the freedom to turn away from virtue to evil. He writes, "As long as the good is present in the nature, vice is a thing that has no inherent existence; while the departure of the better state becomes the origin of its opposite."²⁶⁷ Participation in the goodness of God demands that humankind imitate His goodness by choosing virtue over evil. Gregory argues that God is not the author of evil. Evil comes about by human freedom of will, the deliberate act of the human person to choose what is pleasing over what is good and beautiful. According to Gregory:

...His[her] feeling towards that which pleased him[her] depended only on his[her] own private judgment; he[she] was free to choose whatever he[she] liked; and so he [she] was a free agent, though circumvented with cunning, when he[she] drew upon himself[herself] that disaster which now overwhelms humanity. He[she] became himself[herself] the discoverer of evil, but he[she] did not therein discover what God had made; for God did not make death. [The human person] became, in fact, himself

²⁶⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity* XII, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 357.

²⁶⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* V, 479.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 479-480.

[herself] the fabricator, to a certain extent, and the crafts[person] of evil.²⁶⁸

Gregory argues that the Author of Life has no association with death. It is the deliberate choice of the human will, he claims, that manifests evil. Having no substantial existence on its own, Gregory posits that evil, completely dependent upon the human will, is the absence of the good. In his words:

...There is a logical opposition to that which is and that which is not...non-entity is only *logically* opposed to entity, in the same way...the word vice is opposed to the word virtue, not as being any existence in itself, but only as becoming thinkable by the absence of the better.²⁶⁹

God is not the maker of things that are non-existent. Therefore, God is not the maker of evil.²⁷⁰ Evil comes about by human misuse of the gift of free will.

Gross observes that Gregory links the gift of free will with human intelligence. Inherent in human nature, human intelligence is essential to the likeness of humankind with God.²⁷¹ Gregory posits that rational nature is endowed “with sense and is guided by the mind.”²⁷² Implanted by God in human nature, he adds that this God-like attribute empowers humanity to set their desire on divine things.²⁷³ God, who is “mind and word,”²⁷⁴ desires that human persons engage their gift of “word and understanding...[in] imitation of the very Mind and Word.”²⁷⁵ According to Gross, Gregory believes that the divine kinship of free will and intelligence is the primordial likeness to God.²⁷⁶ These

²⁶⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, *ibid.*

²⁶⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* VI, 480-481.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 482.

²⁷¹ Gross, 178.

²⁷² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* VIII, 4, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 393.

²⁷³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism* V, 479.

²⁷⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* V, 2, 391.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁶ Gross, 179.

divine attributes, if used as they are designed, will result in the human person's participation in the beauty and glory of God. In Gregory's view, these gifts are God's grace:

...our Maker has bestowed upon our formation a certain Godlike grace, by implanting in His image the likeness of His own excellences, for this reason He gave of His bounty, His other good gifts to human nature; but mind and reason we cannot strictly say that He *gave*, but that He *imparted* them, adding to the image the proper adornment of His own nature.²⁷⁷

Clearly, for Gregory, human nature is most like God in the assignment of mind and reason.²⁷⁸ He concludes that this divine gift serves as the human capacity to receive the glory of Him who created them.²⁷⁹ In this way, human nature has the capacity to reflect divine nature.²⁸⁰

Gregory was clearly convinced of the immortality of the soul. Gregory describes the deification that occurs after physical death, speaking of the "soul's migration from the seen to the unseen"²⁸¹ and "the souls that have at last flitted away from human life."²⁸² Rather than using *theosis*, Gregory preferred the use of "participation" language to express union with God.²⁸³ In the following passage, he describes the soul's final deification:

...The soul, having become simple and single in form and so perfectly godlike, finds that perfectly simple and immaterial good which is really worth enthusiasm and love; it attaches itself to it and blends with it by means of the movement and activity of love, fashioning itself according to that which it is continually finding and grasping.²⁸⁴

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, IX, 1, 395.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, XII, 9, 398

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 399.

²⁸¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. V (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1994), 443.

²⁸² *Ibid.*

²⁸³ Russell, 226.

²⁸⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, 450.

In this way, Gregory believes that the soul becomes capable of unlimited love through its assimilation to God and participation in Him and His goodness.²⁸⁵

Image in the Body

The Bishop of Nyssa also recognizes that the human body is created in God's image.²⁸⁶ According to Gross, Gregory claims that the human body is endowed with a dignity that entitles the human person to immortality, impassibility and deification.²⁸⁷ The mark of this "royal dignity,"²⁸⁸ is revealed in the upright position of humankind.²⁸⁹ Unlike other living creatures, the human person walks with [his/her] gaze fixed toward the sky. [He/she] carries out the designs of human reasoning with the gift of hands.²⁹⁰ Armed with natural weapons and coverings, other creatures are created with their bodies bowed downwards.²⁹¹ The human person, fashioned from the dust of the earth, receives life through God's inspiration in order "that the earthly might be raised up to the Divine."²⁹² Clearly, Gregory believes that the original state of humankind was elevated to the highest of forms. Created as "king over the earth and all things on it,"²⁹³ the human person was endowed with a form that reflected the beauty of the Archetype. Impassionate and immersed in Truth, God's first human creatures enjoyed "a face-to-face manifestation of the personal Deity"²⁹⁴ whose blessings strengthened them.²⁹⁵ Gregory

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ Gross, 179.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

²⁸⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, VIII, 1, 393.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, VIII, 2, 393.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

²⁹² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VI, 480

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 481.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

believes that human nature was not susceptible to the passions, to suffering or death, as they were foreign to the initial state.²⁹⁶ Being created as good from the beginning, he argues that only “knowledge and eternity of life”²⁹⁷ were needed to satisfy the appetite of the human person.²⁹⁸ Because of “bodily impassibility,” it appears to Gregory that material food was not needed, nor even implied by the fruits of the trees of Paradise.²⁹⁹ Interpreted in a spiritual sense, Gregory claims the tree in Paradise signified all that is good.³⁰⁰

Who will give to him that has a healthful hunger that tree that is in Paradise, which includes all good, which is named ‘every tree,’ in which this passage bestows on [humankind] the right to share? For in the universal and transcendent saying every form of good is in harmony with itself, and the whole is one.³⁰¹

As Gross suggests, Gregory held that Adam was not burdened with “dissolute passions,”³⁰² but that he was deified in the sense that he enjoyed God’s vision and the company of the angels.³⁰³ He clarifies, however, that although human beings partake of divine attributes, they do not attain identity of divine nature. The difference, he argues, lies in the created nature of humanity that is subject to change. God, the Uncreated Nature, is unchanging.³⁰⁴ Thus, Adam’s deliberate choice to turn away from God in disobedience manifests his changing nature that fell from its godlike state.³⁰⁵

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, XII, 357.

²⁹⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, V, 479.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁹ Gross, 180.

³⁰⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XIX, 3, 409.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

³⁰² Gross, 180.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

The bishop of Nyssa finds evidence for his belief in the immortality of the body in Adam's state before the Fall.³⁰⁶ He supports his argument with the following text:

Since, then, one of the excellences connected with the Divine nature is also eternal existence, it was altogether needful that the equipment of our nature should not be without the further gift of this attribute, but should have in itself the immortal that by its inherent faculty it might both recognize what is above it, and be possessed with a desire for the divine and eternal life.³⁰⁷

On the question of the immortality of the body, Gregory relies on the fashioning of the human person in the likeness to God as the inherent qualification for immortality. He states that deification, which presupposes immortality, is possible for humanity because they are created "as far as is possible in [the] likeness to the Archetype."³⁰⁸ Gregory continues his argument, noting that within the mystery of the Resurrection of Christ, one finds assurance that the human body will be resurrected.

Out of the "superabundance" of God's omnipotence, not only is the human body restored that has dissolved, but 'great and splendid additions' are given to the body to make it even more splendid. Like the grain of wheat, buried in the ground that sheds its outer casing and rises into a beautiful and more complex fruit, so, too, does the natural body that is buried in 'corruption,' in 'weakness,' in dishonour' rise as a spiritual body that is incorrupt, powerful and glorious, 'in absolute perfection'³⁰⁹...the Resurrection is no other thing than '*the reconstitution of our nature in its original form.*'³¹⁰

As Gross suggests, Gregory recognizes that human nature does not have the power to save itself from the consequences of sin and death.³¹¹ The patriarch posits that by the merits of Christ's Resurrection, human nature is restored to immortality. Furthermore, the body that dissolved in corruption will rise incorrupt and perfected.

³⁰⁶ Gross, 179.

³⁰⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, V, 479.

³⁰⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XII, 9, 399; quoted in Gross, 180.

³⁰⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 466.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 467.

³¹¹ Gross, 182.

As Gross indicates, the gifts of immortality and incorruptibility are essential to Gregory's concept of deification and come about as the effects of the union of the human person with God.³¹² These divine attributes will only be realized in the new age of the Kingdom, after the resurrection of the body. At this time, Gregory argues that human nature will partake of the glory of God in eternal happiness and union with Him³¹³ and *theosis* will be complete.

The Fall of the Deified Form

Gregory's writings suggest that the bishop of Nyssa links the fall of the human person and [his/her] deified form to the envy of the fallen angel. He states, "[The human person] was a thing divine before his[her] humanity got within reach of the assault of evil."³¹⁴ Gregory concludes that the fallen angel was jealous of humanity's royal and lofty state. Therefore, he resorted to "his passion of envy."³¹⁵ Gregory claims that "Envy became the serpent who seduced Eve."³¹⁶ In *La Vie de Moïse*, Gregory describes envy as the "the father of death."³¹⁷

...La jalousie, la passion qui est la première cause du mal, l'origine de la mort, la première entrée du péché, la racine du vice, la source de la tristesse, la mère des malheurs, la cause de la désobéissance, le commencement de la honte. La jalousie nous a chassés du Paradis, s'étant faite serpent pour séduire Ève; la jalousie nous a écartés de l'arbre de vie et, nous ayant dépouillés des vêtements sacrés, nous a revêtus de feuilles de figure dérisoires.³¹⁸

...Envy is the passion which causes evil, the father of death, the first entrance of sin, the root of wickedness, the birth of sorrow, the mother of misfortune, the basis of disobedience, the beginning of shame. Envy banished us from Paradise,

³¹² Gross, 186.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, 187-188.

³¹⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 464.

³¹⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VI, 481.

³¹⁶ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse II*, 256, 283.

³¹⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 256, 120.

³¹⁸ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse II*, 256, 283.

having become a serpent to oppose Eve. Envy walled us off from the tree of life, divested us of holy garments, and in shame led us away clothed with fig leaves.³¹⁹

Gregory concludes that envy's passion enticed the fallen angel, under the guise of a serpent, to seduce Eve.³²⁰ In Gregory's view, it was unbearable to the fallen angel that human nature possess the capacity to reflect the greatness of God more than he.

Consequently, his envy caused the evil which first introduced sin into the world and became "the beginning and antecedent of death and destruction."³²¹ Having worked his "evil poison,"³²² that is, the passion of his envy on the first ancestors, the serpent introduced Adam and Eve to the consequences of choosing the opposite of goodness.³²³

Now in an unnatural state, human nature is subject to passion, to suffering and to mortality. Far removed from the divine image and divine likeness of the natural state,³²⁴ humankind is separated from the source of their life.

As Gross suggests, Gregory concludes that both a physical and spiritual death are the consequences of the Fall.³²⁵ Due to the gravity of sin, human nature lost its deiform state.³²⁶ Gregory describes this change of condition in the following passage:

That godly beauty of the soul which was an imitation of the Archetypal Beauty, like fine steel blackened with the vicious rust, preserved no longer the glory of its familiar essence, but was disfigured with the ugliness of sin.³²⁷

³¹⁹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 256, 120.

³²⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VI, 480.

³²¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man* XX, 3, 410.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ *Ibid.*, 481.

³²⁴ Meredith, 58.

³²⁵ Gross, 181.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*

³²⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, XII, 357.

Gregory likens sin to falling into mud and becoming unrecognizable by the smears of evil.³²⁸ He argues that sin strips human nature of its “godlike beauty”³²⁹ and deprives the human soul of the grace of its original state created in God’s image.³³⁰

Gregory notes, however, that the beneficent Creator clothed his human creature with a covering that would secure and protect the nature that was created for immortality. God’s intervention assures that corrupted human nature will be dissolved into the soil from which it was formed. By the merits of Christ’s Resurrection, the resurrected bodies of the faithful will be restored to their original beauty.³³¹ Thus, having been divested of the coverings of skins, restored human creation will stand before the Creator.³³²

Theosis themes frame Gregory’s teaching on the creation of humankind in God’s image and likeness. The divine kinship imparted to created human nature has as its goal and final destiny, humanity’s participation in the glory of God and the fullness of divine plenitude. Even after Adam and Eve fell to the passion of envy at work in the fallen angel, Gregory posits that God redeemed their fallen nature through His Son. Gregory argues that since both body and soul are created in God’s image, the physical and spiritual death caused by the Fall are both restored to incorruptibility and immortality. God’s human creation is thus deified and glorified in the Divine Presence.

³²⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, XII, 357.

³²⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VIII, 480.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VIII, 482-483.

³³² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On Virginity*, XII, 359.

The Incarnation

As Gross observes, after the transgression, God, by a single, divine command, could have restored human nature.³³³ Now imprisoned in the darkness of sin and death, humanity was in need of the One who restores them to life and ransoms them from the clutches of sin and death.³³⁴ Gregory asks, “By whom was [humankind] to be recalled to the grace of its original state?”³³⁵ His answer supports the revelation of the Truth as taught in the tradition of the Church.³³⁶ “To whom else than entirely to Him Who is the Lord of [humankind’s] nature?”³³⁷ The Incarnate *Logos* of God descends to the humble human state³³⁸ out of His love for humankind. He submits Himself to being born in a human body, passing through the stages of life, death and resurrection³³⁹ for this purpose: “that by this communion with Deity, [humankind] might at the same time be deified...”³⁴⁰ The mystery of divine love draws humankind into a share in divine glory by the Incarnation of the Son of God.

The doctrinal formulation of *theosis* was enriched by the “mixture” language of Gregory’s christology.³⁴¹ Fearing that *theosis* terminology would infringe upon God’s transcendent and unknowable nature, Gregory preferred to use the language of participation.³⁴² He posits that the Son of God assumed human flesh so that humanity

³³³ Gross, 182.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, XV, 487.

³³⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VIII, 484-485.

³³⁶ Gross, 182.

³³⁷ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, VIII, 485.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, XXIV, 494.

³³⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XV, 487.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, XXXVIII, 506.

³⁴¹ Russell, 229.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 232.

might become participants in the life of the divine Persons.³⁴³ Gregory writes, “He was mingled with humanity” just as impure materials are mixed with gold and burned away in the consuming fire, so are the evils of human nature expelled by the mixing with “Deity veiled in human nature” to retain their “original luster.”³⁴⁴ God takes hold of human nature, whose origin is in Him, and as His flesh meets the fallen flesh of human nature, He is not affected by it. Rather, through the Incarnation, human nature is deified:

...By assuming in Himself all of humanity...He has mingled His life-giving power with the mortal and perishable nature, and, by union with it, He has changed our mortality in grace and strength of life. And we are saying that the mystery according to the flesh of the Lord consists in this: the immutable takes residence in the mutable, in order that, by changing for better the inferior element and delivering it from the malice which had been mingled with the mutable nature, He might wipe out the evil in the nature, consuming it in Himself.³⁴⁵

Through the Incarnation, Christ reunites separated human nature with His divine nature “in a union never to be broken,”³⁴⁶ thus, recalling the “primal grace” of humanity and restoring them to “everlasting life.”³⁴⁷ As Russell notes, Gregory uses mixture language in his christological and soteriological development of *theosis*.³⁴⁸ Humanity taken up in Christ is transformed but never annihilated.³⁴⁹ Gregory’s christology is clearly grounded in a soteriology that upholds the transformation of human nature into a “new glorified humanity;”³⁵⁰ one which participates in the divine characteristics of immortality, incorruptibility and eternal union.³⁵¹

³⁴³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XXVII, 496.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, XXVI, 495-496.

³⁴⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Against Eunomius*, 51 (45:700c-d); quoted in Gross, 183.

³⁴⁶ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XVI, 489.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁸ Russell, 229.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 230.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

Gregory's resurrection theology reveals that deification themes are implicated in some areas of his work. Gregory states that the Resurrection is the return of the dissolved elements (body and soul) into an indissoluble union. What was once corruptible has become incorruptible.³⁵² He believes that both body and soul are created in the image of God in a deified form as far as possible. Restoration of these elements recalls the original state of grace with which humanity was invested. As the Bishop of Nyssa notes, when God created humanity in the image and likeness, it was divine grace.³⁵³ Also, the mutual incorporation that effects the resurrection of the human body results in the extension of Christ's resurrected life to all of humankind in the same manner that the Incarnation of the Word deifies all of humanity. Gregory comments on the effects of Christ's Resurrection on the resurrection of human bodies, "For when, in that concrete humanity which he had taken to Himself, the soul after the dissolution returned to the body, then this uniting of the several portions passes, as by a new principle, in equal force upon the whole human race."³⁵⁴ Gregory claims that at the end of time, those left in life will be transformed to incorruptibility like those who have already "undergone the resurrection change."³⁵⁵ Having lost the burden of the flesh, they will ascend "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" and remain with Him forever.³⁵⁶ Clearly, the themes of incorruptibility, immortality, transformation of human nature, ascent, and eternal union with God, articulate the deifying character of Gregory's resurrection theology.

³⁵² St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XVI, 489.

³⁵³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XXX, 34.

³⁵⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, *ibid*.

³⁵⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Making of Man*, XXII, 412.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*.

Sacramental Dimension

As Gross suggests, Gregory attributes individual deification to the reception of the sacraments of Baptism and Eucharist.³⁵⁷ Because of the composite nature of the human person, Gregory argues that the body must be purified in the waters of baptism.³⁵⁸ According to Russell, one takes hold of the new life merited by Christ's Resurrection through the triple immersion in the waters of His Paschal Mystery. In this fashion, one is clothed with the garment of incorruptibility.³⁵⁹ As Gregory writes, Christ's burial in the earth, and resurrection to life on the third day, is enacted by the baptized in the threefold immersion in the water and the rising out of it.³⁶⁰ Those who share in the fellowship and the humanity which Christ assumed share a likeness to Him as He prepares the way.³⁶¹ According to Gregory, Baptism is the victory over evil. In the *Life of Moses*, he parallels the drowning of the Egyptian army in the Red Sea with the cleansing role of Baptism on the passions of the soul:

...tous ceux qui passent par l'eau sacramentelle du baptême doivent faire mourir dans l'eau toute l'armée des vices qui leur font la guerre comme l'avarice, les désirs impurs, l'esprit de rapine, les sentiments de vanité et d'orgueil, les élans de violence, la colère, la rancune, l'envie, la jalousie et les autres passions qui accompagnent en quelque sorte naturellement notre nature, qu'il s'agisse des mauvais mouvements de l'âme ou des actes qui en sont les conséquences.³⁶²

Those who pass through the mystical water in baptism must put to death in the water the whole phalanx of evil—such as covetousness, unbridled desire, rapacious thinking, the passion of conceit and arrogance, wild impulse, wrath, anger, malice, envy, and all such things. Since the passions naturally pursue our nature, we must put to death in the water both the base movements of the mind and the acts which

³⁵⁷ Gross, 185.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ Russell, 230.

³⁶⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XXXV, 502.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 125, 183.

issue from them.³⁶³

Gregory observes that Baptism destroys all that belongs to the corruptible nature. The baptismal waters drown the passions of evil and all that opposes virtue so that human nature is restored to its inclination toward the good.

The believer who is cleansed and purified in the baptismal waters receives the pledge of salvation and an invitation to participate in divinity. Gregory writes: “Oh! How great and how wonderful it is, that it should imply relationship with Deity itself!”³⁶⁴ As noted, Gregory’s understanding of *theosis* is expressed in terms of participation in a relationship with God. In Baptism, he believes that humanity is once again restored to right relationship with God. Baptism, the “other birth”³⁶⁵ is the union with divinity that holds the promise of salvation and the hope of deification.

In addition to Baptism, Gregory argues the role of the Eucharist in the deification of humankind.

But since the human being is a twofold creature, compounded of soul and body, it is necessary that the saved should lay hold of the Author of the new life through both their component parts. Accordingly, the soul, being fused into Him through faith, derives from that the means and occasion of salvation; for the act of union with the life implies a fellowship with the life. But the body comes into fellowship and blending with the Author of our salvation in another way.³⁶⁶

As Russell notes, Gregory posits that the Eucharist is the “glorified flesh of Christ”³⁶⁷ which imparts immortality and incorruption to the bodies of those who receive the sacrament. In other words, Gregory strongly proposes the deifying role of the Eucharist, especially in terms of the body. Christ’s body deifies those who receive Him by

³⁶³ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 125, 84.

³⁶⁴ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XXXVII, 504.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XXXIII, 501.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ Russell, 230.

transmitting immortality and incorruption. Therefore, fellowship in the Body of Christ results in human participation in immortality and incorruption. Gregory believes that God “infused Himself” into “perishable humanity” in order to deify humanity by communion with Him.³⁶⁸ The following text summarizes Gregory’s notion of physical deification:

He disseminates Himself in every believer through that flesh, whose substance comes from bread and wine, blending Himself with the bodies of believers, to secure that, by this union with the immortal, [humankind], too, may be a sharer in incorruption.³⁶⁹

In the same fashion that the forbidden fruit, the deadly poison of evil, entered the body and rendered it corruptible, Gregory posits that another food must serve as the antidote to render it incorruptible. Gregory identifies this remedy as the Body of Christ:

What then is this remedy to be? Nothing else than that very Body which has been shown to be superior to death, and has been the first-fruits of our life...the Body of Christ.³⁷⁰

Gregory’s treatment of the deifying role of Baptism and Eucharist manifest his concern for the deification of the whole person. His work takes the concept of physical deification to new levels and opens doors to the need for further development of the sacramental character of *theosis*. Baptism and Eucharist manifest that faith and divine grace enable humanity to share in Christ’s saving action so that immortality, incorruption and deification are once again possible.³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, XXXIII, 505-506.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 504-505.

³⁷¹ Russell, 229.

The Soul's Ascent to God

According to Russell, Gregory's sacramental theology suggests that the faculties of the soul have been raised to "the contemplation of God as true life, true beauty, and true goodness."³⁷² Russell's observation identifies the theme of the ascent of the soul to God, which is fundamental in understanding *theosis*. As the soul is purified through the sacramental life, it becomes more absorbed in contemplation and less weighted down by earthly passions. In this way, it is free to enter into the experience of God's love. This is the goal of contemplation. As Russell notes, Gregory characterizes the soul's ascent in the "images of light, cloud, and darkness" in his treatise, *La Vie de Moïse*.³⁷³

As Gross has noted, the theme of the transcendence of God dominates the theology of the bishop of Nyssa.³⁷⁴ Gregory refers to this divine attribute in the following manner, "The ineffable depth of [the] mystery...of the doctrine of God's nature"³⁷⁵ He believes those who study this mystery in depth, although they lack the power to explain it in words, are invited to understand as far as is possible for them³⁷⁶ the following truth:

...la Vie véritable c'est celui qui est par essence. Or cet être est inaccessible à la connaissance...³⁷⁷ C'est en effet une montagne escarpée et d'accès vraiment difficile que la connaissance de Dieu...À peine la foule peut-elle parvenir à sa base.³⁷⁸

True Being is true life. This Being is inaccessible to knowledge....³⁷⁹ The knowledge of God is a mountain steep indeed and difficult to climb—the majority of people

³⁷² Russell, 231.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁴ Gross, 176.

³⁷⁵ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, III, 477.

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁷ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 235, 269.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 158, 207.

³⁷⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 235, 115.

scarcely reach its base.³⁸⁰

Gregory posits that those who turn away from worldly and selfish matters attain knowledge of God's transcendent nature by a mystical ascent³⁸¹ and a share in goodness of the Divine Being. He writes, "Ce qui est Bien au sens premier et propre, dont la bonté est l'essence, c'est-à-dire la Divinité elle-même, est réellement ce qu'implique son essence."³⁸² (The Divine One is Himself the Good, in the primary and proper sense of the word, whose very nature is goodness.)³⁸³ Gregory demonstrates that the Divine Being invites humankind to ascend to the heights of knowledge and participation in His divine goodness. Turning towards God is the way of light. Those who acknowledge God's call to deification have been purified in the light.³⁸⁴

Gregory refers to the unlimited, infinite nature of God as "la vertu parfaite."³⁸⁵ (perfect virtue) According to Gregory, those who know what is good by nature desire to participate in it and to strive for perfection through the pursuit of virtue. "Mais celui qui recherche la vraie vertu, à quoi participe-t-il, sinon à Dieu, puisque la vertu parfaite est Dieu meme."³⁸⁶ (Certainly whoever pursues true virtue, participates in nothing other than God, because He is himself absolute virtue) As Russell indicates, Gregory does not mean to suggest that participation in virtue means that one has taken possession of God nor that one is participating in divine nature. Rather, one is participating in the attributes of God and imitating God's nature. The way of imitation

³⁸⁰ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 11, 158, 93.

³⁸¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Great Catechism*, II, 476-477.

³⁸² Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, I, 7, 51.

³⁸³ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, I, 7, 31.

³⁸⁴ Russell, 231.

³⁸⁵ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, I, 7, 51.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

restores the divine likeness in humankind.³⁸⁷ In this way, Gregory maintains his theory of the utter transcendence of God who calls humanity into relationship.³⁸⁸

Using the theme of participation, Gregory articulates the union of humanity with God. By means of allegorical exegesis,³⁸⁹ Gregory examines how the virtuous life leads to perfection in his treatise on *The Life of Moses*. Humanity's ascent to union with God is illustrated by Moses' continual longing and desire for Him:

...Ayant une fois mis le pied à l'échelle, «sur laquelle Dieu se tenait,» comme dit Jacob, il ne cesse de monter à l'échelon supérieur, continuant toujours de s'élever, parce que chaque march qu'il occupe dans la hauteur débouche sur un au-delà.³⁹⁰

Once having set foot on the ladder which God set up, (as Jacob says), he continually climbed to the step above and never ceased to rise higher, because he always found a step higher than the one he had attained.³⁹¹

The soul's unending quest for God is the theological theme that comprises the scope of *La Vie de Moïse* with an ethical plan. Like the infinite nature of God, Who is limitless, so, too, is the soul's ascent to God without end.³⁹²

Et c'est là réellement voir Dieu que de ne jamais trouver de satiété à ce désir. Mais il faut, regardant toujours à travers ce qu'il est possible de voir, être enflammé du désir de voir davantage parce qu'il est déjà possible de voir. Et ainsi nulle limite ne saurait interrompre le progrès de la montée vers Dieu, puisque d'un côté le Beau n'a pas de borne et que de l'autre la progression du désir tendu vers Lui ne saurait être arrêtée par aucune satiété.³⁹³

This truly is the vision of God: never to be satisfied in the desire to see him. But one must always, by looking at what he can see, rekindle his desire to see more. Thus, no limit would interrupt growth in the ascent to God, since no limit to the Good can be

³⁸⁷ Russell, 231-232.

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ David M. Hay, ed., *Studia Philonica Monographs: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism, Philonic Exegesis in Gregory of Nyssa's De Vita Moysis*, by Albert C. Geljon (Providence: Brown Judaic Studies, 2002), 65.

³⁹⁰ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 227, 264-265.

³⁹¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 227, 113-114.

³⁹² Geljon, 65.

³⁹³ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 239, 271.

found nor is the increasing of desire for the Good brought to an end because it is satisfied.³⁹⁴

The insatiable desire of the soul propels humankind in an upward movement to communion with God. As the soul ascends towards God, there is a deepening of one's conviction about God that confesses His true existence, His unknowability and His infinite nature.

Gregory describes the movement and progression towards God in a series of three theophanies. Each divine revelation represents Moses' progress in the virtuous life.³⁹⁵ As Russell observes, Daniélou identifies a threefold pattern of Gregory's spiritual doctrine unfolding with the theophanies. Each of these texts: a) is "related to the person of Christ;" b) "illustrate a central truth about divine nature;" and c) imply "moral consequences."³⁹⁶ Having been purified by the light of God's beauty and truth, the soul is raised to the contemplation of God. Having passed into God's presence by divine love,³⁹⁷ it finds rest in the glorious presence of God, who reveals His resplendent and utterly transcendent Being.

The First Theophany

Gregory's interpretation of Moses' ascent to Mt. Sinai is marked with allegorical exegesis. The first theophany reveals God as an illumination in the Truth.³⁹⁸ Gregory describes the first theophany, "Et cette verité qui s'est manifestée alors à Moïse dans la mystérieuse apparition, c'est Dieu."³⁹⁹ (This truth, which was then manifested by the

³⁹⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 239, 116.

³⁹⁵ Meredith, 70.

³⁹⁶ Meredith, 70-71.

³⁹⁷ Russell, 231.

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁹⁹ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 19, 117.

ineffable and mysterious illumination that came to Moses, is God)⁴⁰⁰ The illumined soul turns toward God who bathes it in truth and light, purifying it from the deception of the senses.⁴⁰¹ Gregory observes that “Truth” and “Light” are names that indicate the Incarnate Son of God. Therefore, he concludes that God who reveals Himself in the burning bush is the *Logos*.⁴⁰²

Si en effet «la vérité» est Dieu et si elle est aussi «lumière» --ce sont là les expressions sublimes que l'Évangile emploie pour designer le Dieu qui s'est manifesté pour nous dans la chair...⁴⁰³

For if truth is God and truth is light—the Gospel testifies by these sublime and divine Names to the God who made himself visible to us in the flesh...⁴⁰⁴

According to Gregory's theory of the ascent of the soul, Moses encounters the way of light. He is bathed in the purifying and illuminating light of Christ who leads him towards God. The moral directive of this first theophany is symbolized in the directive to Moses to remove his sandals. As Meredith suggests, this means that life lived in obedience to God leads one to knowledge of the truth.⁴⁰⁵ Moses removed his sandals in reverence of the divine presence, thereby he was able to advance towards God, who is Truth.⁴⁰⁶ Thus, he writes in his treatise, «La voie qui le conduit à cette gnose est la pureté...»⁴⁰⁷ (The way to such knowledge is purity.)⁴⁰⁸ In Gregory's presentation of the first theophany of Moses, he demonstrates that God initiates the relationship of union with Him. Gregory posits that the Word of God is the Light and Truth revealed to Moses

⁴⁰⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 19, 59.

⁴⁰¹ Russell, 231.

⁴⁰² Geljon, 94.

⁴⁰³ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 20, 117.

⁴⁰⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 20, 59.

⁴⁰⁵ Meredith, 72.

⁴⁰⁶ Geljon, 94.

⁴⁰⁷ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 154, 205.

⁴⁰⁸ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 154, 92.

on Mt. Sinai. The first theophany reveals God's invitation to humanity to share in an intimate relationship with Him. Life lived in acknowledgement of the transcendent and holy God in obedience to his commands, leads to knowledge of the Truth and union with God, outside of whom nothing exists.

The Second Theophany

In the second theophany, Moses enters into the darkness of the cloud. Gregory asks, «Mais que signifient d'autre part l'entrée de Moïse dans la ténèbre et la vision que dans celle-ci eut de Dieu?»⁴⁰⁹ (What does it mean that Moses entered the darkness and then saw God in it?)⁴¹⁰ The way of the cloud denotes a progression towards a more profound manifestation of God, who was first revealed in light. Gregory speaks of God as the "incomprehensible,"⁴¹¹ Being "whose nature transcends all knowledge and is surrounded on all sides by incomprehensibility as by darkness."⁴¹² The soul who longs for and searches for the inaccessible and unknowable God must, as Gregory depicts Moses, rise beyond what is visible and knowable to access the Impenetrable One.⁴¹³

Il affronta les ténèbres elles-mêmes et pénétra dans les réalités invisibles, lui-même se dérobant à la vue. Ayant pénétré en effet dans le sanctuaire de la divine mystagogie, il y entra en contact avec l'invisible, disparaissant à la vue, enseignant, je pense, par là, que celui qui veut s'approcher de Dieu doit quitter tout le visible et ayant élevé son esprit vers l'invisible et l'incompréhensible, comme sur le sommet d'une montagne, croire que le divin demeure là où n'atteint plus la saisie de l'intelligence.⁴¹⁴

He boldly approached the very darkness itself and entered the invisible things where he was no longer seen by those watching. After he entered the inner sanctuary of the divine mystical doctrine, there, while not being seen, he was in company with the invisible. He teaches, I think, by the things he did that the one who is going to

⁴⁰⁹ Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, II, 162, 211.

⁴¹⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, 162, 94.

⁴¹¹ Meredith, 73.

⁴¹² Geljon, 128.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, 129.

⁴¹⁴ Grégoire de Nysse, I, 46, 85.

associate intimately with God must go beyond all that is visible and (lifting up his own mind, as to a mountaintop, to the invisible and incomprehensible) believe that the divine is *there* where the understanding does not reach.⁴¹⁵

God, who first reveals Himself in the light, lures Moses into the darkness and reveals the incomprehensibility of his divine nature.

The second or intermediary theophany describes the soul who enters “beyond matter and beyond sight” to an unapproachable region in order to find God.⁴¹⁶ According to Meredith, Philo claims that God is not in the darkness because the senses cannot grasp Him. Gregory, on the other hand, holds that God is in the darkness and can be perceived by the faculties of the soul.⁴¹⁷ He argues that the mind must rise above both sense perception and intellectual perception and direct itself interiorly to the invisible and incomprehensible. Gregory is clear, however, that no created being is able to access or to know God in His unknowable and unapproachable essence.⁴¹⁸

The second theophany serves as a moral exhortation to continue in the pursuit of progress towards perfection and enlightenment. It is also a challenge to grow in understanding of the divinity of the Incarnate Word.⁴¹⁹ The cloud of darkness is the preferred image used by the early Fathers to express the incomprehensibility of God’s nature. This truth is at the heart of a religious attitude known as apophaticism, or negative theology.⁴²⁰ The principle idea of apophaticism, or negative theology, is

⁴¹⁵ Gregory of Nyssa, I, 46, 43.

⁴¹⁶ Philo of Alexandria, *On the Posterity and Exile of Cain*, V, 14; quoted in Meredith, 74.

⁴¹⁷ Meredith, 58.

⁴¹⁸ Geljon, 128, 130.

⁴¹⁹ Meredith, 74-75.

⁴²⁰ Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 34-35.

articulated by Lot-Borrodine, «Dieu, à la fois transcendant et immanent.»⁴²¹ (God, who is at the same time transcendent and immanent) Gregory writes that Moses grew to know God in the darkness. But his knowledge led him to realize the unknowability and incomprehensibility of the divine nature.⁴²² Therefore he describes God, «Quel Dieu? Celui qui a fait de l'obscurité sa retraite.»⁴²³ (What God? He who *made darkness his hiding place*.)⁴²⁴ For Gregory of Nyssa, the second theophany represents the way of contemplation that fills the soul with an ever deepening desire for God and the realization that He cannot be fully grasped.

The Third Theophany

The third theophany originates in Moses' request of God, "Do let me see your glory!" (Ex 33:18) Having passed through the way of darkness, Moses' soul was filled with unending desire for God. Moses' longing is likened to the soul that loves what is beautiful and hungers to enjoy the vision of God face-to-face. It signifies the ascent of the soul that has totally surrendered its earthly conception of God's nature.⁴²⁵ As Meredith indicates, Gregory's work exposes the central message of this passage: there is no limit to the divine. "Where there is no limit, there must be an infinity of either being or beauty or goodness."⁴²⁶ In Williams view, divine infinity provides the "ground of [the human person's] self-transcendence"⁴²⁷ and leads to an understanding of apophatic theology.

⁴²¹ M. Lot-Borrodine, «La doctrine de la « déification » dans l'Église grecque jusqu'au X^e siècle,» *Revue de L'Histoire des Religions* 150 (1932); 16.

⁴²² Gregory of Nyssa, *The Life of Moses*, II, 164, 95.

⁴²³ Grégoire de Nysse, II, 164, 213.

⁴²⁴ Gregory of Nyssa, *ibid*.

⁴²⁵ Geljon, 142.

⁴²⁶ Meredith, 75.

⁴²⁷ Rowan Williams, *The Wound of Knowledge* (London, 1979), 52; quoted in Meredith, 77.

Self-transcendence is manifested by the movement of the soul as it reaches out to God's presence. It constitutes the doctrine of *epektasis* which posits that human goodness is a continual progression in the direction of God. It is an ascent of the soul that unceasingly searches for God in an effort to attain likeness to Him. Moses' request that God reveal Himself exemplifies *epektasis*. God's reply manifests His utter and unapproachable transcendence:

I will make my beauty pass before you, and in your presence I will pronounce my name, 'Lord'...But my face you cannot see, for no [human person] sees me and still lives. Here...is a place near me where you shall station yourself on the rock. When my glory passes I will set you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand that you may see my back; but my face is not to be seen.
(Ex 33:19-23)

Meredith claims that Gregory believes Christ to be the rock, the perfection of virtue, the One who leads humankind to growth in the knowledge and love of God.⁴²⁸ Gregory confirms this in the text, «...C'est dans le Christ que nous croyons que «sont tous les trésors» des biens...»⁴²⁹ (Christ is...the rock, all hope of good things is believed to be in Christ, in whom we have learned all the treasures of good things to be)⁴³⁰ Christ is the true Image of the Invisible God in whose Person divine glory is revealed to humankind. Those who imitate Him become a reflection of the beauty of his divine nature.⁴³¹ According to Russell, as the soul mirrors divine perfection, it draws closer to God.⁴³² This is a culminating factor in the development of Gregory's theology of deification. Humanity can participate in God while simultaneously upholding His utter and

⁴²⁸ Meredith, 77.

⁴²⁹ Grégoire de Nysse, II, 248, 277.

⁴³⁰ Gregory of Nyssa, II, 248, 118.

⁴³¹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 449.

⁴³² Russell, 231.

unapproachable transcendence.⁴³³

The doctrine of *theosis* was advanced by Gregory of Nyssa's soteriology and anthropology. Like Irenaeus before him, the bishop of Nyssa posits that the union of divinity with humanity, established by the Incarnation of the Son of God, deifies human nature. Gregory also taught that deification is extended to the individual through Baptism and Eucharist.⁴³⁴ These sacraments, in turn, grant the believer a share in the divine attributes, enabling growth in divine likeness through the practice of virtue. As Gregory proffered his conviction that humanity was able to share in divinity through participation, he never compromised his conviction regarding the transcendency of God. In his spiritual writings, as evidenced in *La Vie de Moïse*, Gregory demonstrates the soul's capacity to contemplate God's divine attributes. This, in turn, leads to union with God through love as the ultimate destiny of humanity.⁴³⁵ The ascent of Moses to Mt. Sinai serves to describe the journey of *theosis*: transformation and continual growth in perfection, in knowledge, and love of God. Having been illumined by the light of Christ, the human person is drawn into the mystery of the incomprehensibility of God and an ever-deepening relationship with Him. Just as God's nature is inexhaustible, so, too, is the longing of the soul to seek and to know Him.⁴³⁶

Although Gregory preferred to speak of the union between humanity and divinity as participation, his work clearly expanded the theological development of the doctrine of *theosis*. Gregory delineates the deifying characteristics granted to humanity based on his conviction that God created the human body as well as the soul in his divine image. He

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, 232.

⁴³⁴ Gross, 188.

⁴³⁵ Russell, 231.

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*

proffers the deifying role of the Incarnation and argues that the resurrection is the final assurance of the immortality and incorruptibility granted to humankind. Gregory also offers a more advanced synthesis of the sacramental dimension of divine participation. Baptism and Eucharist, he claims, assure the deification of both body and soul. Gregory expands his sacramental theology to include the transformation that occurs when one participates in the divine attributes as experienced through the sacraments. He claims that the sacraments enable the ascent of the soul to God and the eventual union with Him in an eternal life of love and happiness.

Deification as Participation in Divine Light: The Monastic Tradition⁴³⁷

Mt. Sinai, the meeting place of God and humankind, continues to manifest the glory of God. There, in the apse mosaic of St. Catherine's monastery, three scenes portray a hierarchy of theophanies. The central image depicts the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor. Represented in the two panels above the center are Moses and the burning bush on one side, and Moses receiving the tablets of the Law on the other. Long before the theological significance of the mystical relationship of Mt. Sinai and Mt. Tabor were explored and articulated, iconography had already begun to express it.⁴³⁸ The founders of Saint Catherine's linked these revelations in a continuum. On Mt. Sinai, Moses was drawn into the light of the Incarnate Word. Later, on Mt. Tabor, the Incarnate Word would reveal the fullness of His divinity in the Transfiguration.⁴³⁹

The economic rapport between heaven and earth has always been professed by the Eastern Christian tradition. The icon, in its mysterious theological beauty, has a unique

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 310-311.

⁴³⁸ Andreas Andreopoulos, *Metamorphosis: The Transfiguration in Byzantine Theology and Iconography* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005), 196.

⁴³⁹ Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 34.

capacity to unite the heavenly and earthly realms. Its christological foundation is based on St. Paul who writes, “Christ is the image, *εἰκὼν*, of the invisible God.” (Col 1:15) Christ’s visible humanity is the icon of the invisible divinity. At the same time God and Human, Christ brings to fulfillment the image of God in humankind by deifying human nature, opening it to participation in divine life.⁴⁴⁰ This Eastern Christian teaching, the doctrine of *theosis*, maintains that the human person has the potential, through the Incarnation, to transcend the distance between earth and heaven in order to achieve deification through God’s grace.⁴⁴¹ The early Fathers consistently uphold the teaching that the Incarnate *Logos* of God is the supreme connection between heaven and earth. They also affirm the divinity of the Holy Spirit and His role in effecting salvation and deification.

Using the metaphors of ascending a mountain or climbing a ladder, the Fathers describe how one transcends the distance between heaven and earth. These images also convey the *kenosis* of the *Logos* who comes to dwell with His people and to impart His Godhead with them in the Holy Spirit and the Eucharist. Undoubtedly, they were inspired by John’s text, “Amen, amen, I say to you, you will see the sky opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.” (Jn 1:51) The human person was capable of climbing the “cosmological ladder”⁴⁴² or ascending the mystical

⁴⁴⁰ Paul Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, trans. Fr. Steven Bigham (Redondo Beach: Oakwood Publications, 1990), 183-184.

⁴⁴¹ Andreopoulos, 34-35.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 35.

mountain “in the person of Christ who deified human flesh”⁴⁴³ and in the saints whose souls ascended to heaven.⁴⁴⁴

Fifth century monk, John Climacus, in his treatise, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, describes union with God using the image of climbing a ladder to the heavenly sphere. St. Symeon the New Theologian mentions John’s ladder analogy in his discourse on prayer. Keep in mind that John’s ladder analogy included thirty rungs.⁴⁴⁵

Now those who want to ascend a ladder do not start at the top and climb down, but at the bottom and climb up. They ascend the first step, then the second, and so the rest in turn. In this way we can ascend, from earth to heaven. If, then, we wish to attain the perfect stature of the fullness of Christ, like children who are growing up we must start to climb the ladder set before us, until progressing step by step we reach the level of a full-grown [person] and then of an old [person]. The first...is to curtail the passions...The second rung is to practice psalmody...The third rung is to persevere in prayer...The fourth rung...is absorption in contemplation, and this is the state of the perfect.⁴⁴⁶

John’s analogy uses the theme of ascent that was critical in Gregory of Nyssa’s *La Vie Moïse*. His work differs with Gregory in the sense that John regards contemplation as the perfected state, whereas Gregory views contemplation as the means of union with God. John’s treatise ends with the following exhortation:

Ascend, brothers [and sisters], ascend eagerly, and be resolved in your hearts to ascend and hear Him who says: Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the House of our God, who makes our feet like hind’s feet, and sets us on high places, that we may be victorious with His song.

Run, I beseech you, with him who said: Let us hasten until we attain to the unity of faith and of the knowledge of God, to mature [personhood], to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...⁴⁴⁷

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁵ John Climacus, *Ladder of Divine Ascent*, trans. Archimandrite Lazarus Moore (London: Faber and Faber, 1959), 266.

⁴⁴⁶ G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, ed., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*, vol. 4, *The Three Methods of Prayer*, by St. Symeon the New Theologian (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 73-74.

John's text confirms Fairbairn's Eastern model of salvation that proposes elevation as the final act in humanity's vocation to *theosis*. The perfected one who has achieved divine likeness has been elevated to the glorious state of deification.

John, the highly revered abbot of Sinai, belonged to a spiritual monastic tradition of *hesychia* (solitude). This monastic tradition consisted of worship and constant attention to God, particularly through the "unceasing prayer of the Name of Jesus."⁴⁴⁸ By making themselves aware of the actual presence of Jesus in their interior being, the monks often experienced a luminous vision. They began to associate this light with the theophany of Mt. Tabor that they believed was "a manifestation of the same deified Body of Christ"⁴⁴⁹ whose presence is made full and existential in the sacraments.⁴⁵⁰ Like the other monks of the hesychast tradition, John also experienced the divine light. In his writings, he acknowledges this vision as intimately bound to the doctrine of deification.⁴⁵¹

Throughout salvation history, the glory of God has manifested itself through the phenomenon of light. Biblical and patristic writers consider divine light as synonymous with divine glory. The Creed of Nicea describes the relationship of God the Father with the Son as "Light from Light."⁴⁵² The Johannine gospel proclaims the revelation of

⁴⁴⁷ Climacus, 266.

⁴⁴⁸ Meyendorff, 36.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 38,40.

⁴⁵² Andreopoulos, 15-16.

Christ as the “Light of the World.” (Jn 8:12) In the hymnography of the Eastern Church, God is praised as the three-fold divinity of light more than as love or wisdom.⁴⁵³

O Master God, holy and incomprehensible, who didst command the light to shine forth from the darkness...and has raised us up for the glorification...of Thy Goodness...show us children of the light and day, and heirs of Thine eternal good things...unto Thee do we send up glory: to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and ever, and unto the ages of ages.⁴⁵⁴

Another example includes:

Shine in our hearts, O Master, Lover of [humankind], the incorrupt light of knowledge of Thee...For Thou art the sanctification and illumination of our souls and bodies...⁴⁵⁵

In time, human participation and experience of the divine light was identified as deification. Macarius of Egypt connects growth in perfection, *epektasis*, with the “ever-increasing perception of divine light.”⁴⁵⁶ He describes the vision of the prophet Ezekiel as the glory of Christ who illuminates the soul and draws it into participation in the Holy Spirit; thus, making the soul the dwelling place of God:

For the prophet was contemplating a mystery of the soul that was to receive its own Lord and become a throne of glory to him. For a soul that is counted worthy to participate in the Spirit of his light and is illumined by the beauty of his ineffable glory, seeing that he has prepared it for himself as a throne and dwelling, becomes wholly light...thus the soul is illuminated perfectly by the ineffable beauty of the glory of the face of Christ and has participated perfectly in the Holy Spirit, and has been counted worthy to become a throne and dwelling of God.⁴⁵⁷

St. Paul observes how the human person redeemed in Christ grows in similitude to God and becomes His reflection. “All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as from the

⁴⁵³ Mantzaridis, 96.

⁴⁵⁴ St. Tikhon’s Monastery, *The Priest’s Service Book, Prayer IV, Matins* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon’s Seminary Press, 2000), 87.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, *Prayer IX, Matins*, 91.

⁴⁵⁶ Russell, 244.

⁴⁵⁷ St. Macarius of Egypt, *Coll.II, Homily 1,2*; quoted in Russell, 244-245.

Lord who is the Spirit.” (2 Cor 3:18) St. Basil, moved by the iconographic understanding of the human person, also agrees that human destiny is rooted in deification as a participation in divine light. He writes, “[Humankind] has received the order to become god by grace”⁴⁵⁸ for “having come close to light, the soul is transformed into light.”⁴⁵⁹ These and many other writers support the claims of the hesychastic tradition that clearly associates deification with the contemplation of the uncreated Light of God.

As early as the fourth century, the monks of the desert reported experiencing the uncreated light accompanying their prayer. Longing to unite their created nature with the uncreated nature of God, they were filled with “energetic and luminous”⁴⁶⁰ manifestations of God. They began to associate the experience of the divine light in prayer with the Taboric light of the Transfigured Christ. Given the inaccessible and incognoscible nature of the essence of God, they formulated a theology of uncreated light, a teaching centered on the Transfiguration of Christ as a revelation of His divinity.⁴⁶¹ However, these early Eastern mystics of the Christian monastic tradition reserved their experiential secret of the “mystical significance of the light”⁴⁶² within their ascetic tradition. By the early part of the eleventh century, a Studite monk and abbot of Saint Mamas Monastery in Constantinople, Symeon the New Theologian, wrote about his experience of the divine light. A few centuries later, the theology of the uncreated light

⁴⁵⁸ St. Basil the Great, *Laudem Basilii Magni*, *Patrologia Graeca* 36, 560A; quoted in Evdokimov, 185.

⁴⁵⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *Patrologia Graeca* 44, 869A; quoted in Evdokimov, 185.

⁴⁶⁰ Evdokimov, 185.

⁴⁶¹ Andreopoulos, 63.

⁴⁶² Evdokimov, 185.

would draw public attention with the hesychast controversy, the Barlaamites and St.

Gregory of Palamas.⁴⁶³

Saint Symeon The New Theologian

A certain priest-monk, who had full confidence in me as his friend, once told me this: 'I have never celebrated the Liturgy without seeing the Holy Spirit, just as I saw Him come upon me when I was ordained and the metropolitan said the prayer while the service book rested on my head.' When I asked him how he saw it at the time, and in what form, he said: 'Undifferentiated and without form, except as light.' At first I was astonished, beholding what I had never beheld before; and as I was asking myself what it might be, the light said to me, its voice heard only by the intellect: 'Thus have I appeared to all the prophets and apostles, and to those who are now saints and the elect of God; for I am the Holy Spirit of God.' To Him be glory and power through all the ages. Amen.⁴⁶⁴

Although he wrote the above text in the third person, St. Symeon, (949-1022) "the prophet of Christian experience,"⁴⁶⁵ reveals his own experience of the divine light. From the early age of twenty, he began receiving visions of the divine and uncreated light. Highly revered for his life of prayer, he was dubbed "the New Theologian,"⁴⁶⁶ a title reserved solely for St. John the Evangelist and St. Gregory of Nazianzus up to this time. Symeon believed he was called to share his mystical experience so that he could draw others into the life of prayer, and to teach them that contemplative prayer is accessible to all.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶³ Meyendorff, 48.

⁴⁶⁴ G.E.H. Palmer, Philip Sherrard and Kallistos Ware, ed., *The Philokalia: The Complete Text compiled by St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain and St. Makarios of Corinth*, vol. 4, *One Hundred and Fifty-Three Practical and Theological Texts* 153, by St. Symeon the New Theologian (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), 63.

⁴⁶⁵ John Meyendorff, *Christ in Eastern Christian Thought* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1975), 194.

⁴⁶⁶ Sherrard, "Introductory Note," *Philokalia*, 12-13.

⁴⁶⁷ Sherrard, "Introductory Note," *Philokalia*, 12-14.

Symeon was greatly influenced by his predecessor, St. Gregory of Nazianzus. In the following text, Gregory of Nazianzus links participation in the divine with deification:

For the Holy Day of Lights...which we are celebrating [today], has for its origin the Baptism of my Christ, the True Light that lighteneth every [person] that cometh into the world, and effecteth my purification, and assists that light which we received from the beginning from Him above, but which we darkened and confused by sin... 'I am the light of the World.' Therefore, approach ye to Him and be enlightened, and let not your faces be ashamed, being signed with true Light...in order that we...may draw near to the Light, and may then become perfect Light, the children of perfect Light.⁴⁶⁸

Clearly, Gregory claims that ultimate deification rests in the "illumination and participation in the divine light."⁴⁶⁹ His teaching validated Symeon's personal experience.

Theosis is critical in the theology of St. Symeon. His writings reflect an understanding of the christological, pneumatological, sacramental and eschatological character of the doctrine of *theosis*. He bases his belief in the deification of humanity on the Incarnation. "Why did God become [human]?" asks Symeon. "So that [humankind] might become god..."⁴⁷⁰ "God wants this so much that He...descends and appears on earth for this purpose."⁴⁷¹

What is the purpose of the Incarnation of the Divine *Logos*?...Surely it is that He has shared in what is ours so as to make us participants of what is His. For the Son of God, became the Son of Man in order to make us human beings sons [and daughters] of God, raising us up by grace to what He is by nature, giving us a new

⁴⁶⁸ St. Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration on the Holy Lights* XXXIX, I, II, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1996), 352.

⁴⁶⁹ Russell, 302.

⁴⁷⁰ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Ethical and Theological Treatises* 5, 31-34; quoted in Russell, 301.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 7, 598; quoted in Russell, 301.

birth in the Holy Spirit and leading us directly into the Kingdom of heaven.⁴⁷²

St. Symeon attests to the deifying role of the Incarnation. He notes that humanity becomes a partaker, by grace, in the divine life that God is, by nature. As Russell indicates, deification is critical in Symeon's soteriology. He believes that the purpose of the Incarnation was the deification of humankind.⁴⁷³

St. Symeon also recognized the deifying role of the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist. According to Russell, Symeon attests that Baptism enables the believer to be clothed in the divinity of Christ. It is the new birth in the Holy Spirit that deifies the believer by grace and divine adoption.⁴⁷⁴ The Eucharist sustains and nourishes believers by the deifying action of the flesh of the Incarnate Son.⁴⁷⁵ Symeon's communion prayer that follows expresses the theological content of the monastic tradition of the East, and affirms "the need of living contact with God, of conscious communion with Jesus, of the experience of union for every true Christian..."⁴⁷⁶

He who shares in these graces
Divine and deifying is
No wise alone, but is with Thee...
And thus, confiding in Thy rich
Good deeds toward us, I partake—
Rejoicing, trembling too, at once—
Who am but grass, of fire and lo!
--A wonder strange!--I am refreshed
With dew, beyond all speech to tell!⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷² St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Practical and Theological Texts* 108, 48.

⁴⁷³ Russell, 301.

⁴⁷⁴ Russell, 301-302.

⁴⁷⁵ Russell, 302.

⁴⁷⁶ Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 55.

⁴⁷⁷ *A Manual of Eastern Orthodox Prayers* (London: SPCK, 1958), 73-74; quoted in Meyendorff, 52.

Symeon's prayer confirms his belief in the deifying role of the Eucharist. Deification is a grace imparted by God that raises the human person to share in unspeakable levels of divine union.

Symeon maintains that deification begins in this life and leads the faithful to the attainment of likeness to God. Progress and growth in moral behavior hasten the adopted ones to the Kingdom of God. As Russell observes, growth towards spiritual perfection is the path to divine union by illumination.⁴⁷⁸

Symeon's most notable contribution to the development of the doctrine of *theosis* is his teaching that *theosis* is participation in the divine light. With strong theological and scriptural roots, he affirmed his personal experience of communion with the transcendent Mystery and his face-to-face vision with the divine light.⁴⁷⁹ Symeon describes his experience in the following text:

The person inwardly illumined by the light of the Holy Spirit cannot endure the vision of it, but falls face down on the earth and cries out in great fear and amazement, since he has seen and experienced something that is beyond nature, thought or conception. He becomes like someone suddenly inflamed with a violent fever: as though on fire and unable to endure the flames, he is beside himself, utterly incapable of controlling himself. And though he pours forth incessant tears that bring him some relief, the flame of his desire kindles all the more. Then his tears flow yet more copiously and, washed by their flow, he becomes even more radiant. When, totally incandescent, he has become like light, then the saying is fulfilled, 'God is united with gods [us] and known by them' [us]⁴⁸⁰ in the same sense perhaps that He is now united to those who have joined themselves to Him, and revealed to those who have come to know Him.⁴⁸¹

Symeon's description of the encounter with divine light incorporates a physical and a spiritual dimension. While his body reacts to his encounter, his soul, too, longs for union.

⁴⁷⁸ Russell, 302.

⁴⁷⁹ Meyendorff, 51-52.

⁴⁸⁰ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration* 45, III, 424.

⁴⁸¹ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *Practical and Theological Texts*, 68, 38.

Having received the grace of deification, he mirrors the divine in Whom he participates. Language of light fills his description: illumined; light; inflamed; fire; flames; kindles; radiant; and incandescent. As Russell notes, the human person is totally transformed, body and soul, by divine glory.⁴⁸²

Many critics frowned on Symeon's teaching of the divine light, claiming that participation in the light should belong to the eschatological state.⁴⁸³ Nevertheless, Symeon continued to give dramatic testimony to his recurring experiences of the light. His disciple and biographer, Niketas Stethatos relates the consistency of Symeon's encounters:⁴⁸⁴

He saw the Holy Spirit as an infinite and formless light descending upon him... throughout the forty-eight years of his priesthood to see him descend on the sacrifice he was offering to God whenever he celebrated the Liturgy.⁴⁸⁵

Symeon's experience verified his belief that deification begins in this life. It also holds a powerful promise of eschatological fulfillment that awaits those who progress in the spiritual life.⁴⁸⁶

For Symeon, the light of the mystical experience is the light of Christ. Outside of time and space, the mystic is drawn to the light of Christ as the doorway whereby one is led out of darkness. Symeon frequently uses this Johannine image of Christ in his writings. Its influence was especially noted in the icon of the Transfiguration. Christ is depicted as the luminous door by painting an oval *mandorla* around His figure.⁴⁸⁷ Christ

⁴⁸² Russell, 303.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁴ Andreopoulos, 188.

⁴⁸⁵ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 3 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1977), 81; quoted in Andreopoulos, 268, n. 8.

⁴⁸⁶ Russell, 302.

⁴⁸⁷ Andreopoulos, 190.

is the “archetype of every mystic,” “the beginning and the end of mystical illumination.”⁴⁸⁸ Symeon writes:

The light shines on us without evening, without change, without alteration, without form. It speaks, works, lives, gives life, and changes into light those whom it illuminates. We bear witness that “God is light,” and those to whom it has been granted to see Him have all beheld him as light. Those who have seen Him have received him as light, because the light of his glory goes before Him, and it is impossible for Him to appear without light. Those who have not seen his light have not seen Him, for he is the light, and those who have not received the light have not received grace. Those who have received grace have received the light of God and have received God, even as Christ himself, who is the light, has said, ‘I will live in them and move among them.’⁴⁸⁹

St. Symeon’s mystical experiences have led him to conclude that union with God is the illumination and the embrace of divine light. It is divine grace that is imparted by God that transforms and deifies those who receive it. The radiation of divine light totally absorbs those who receive it, making them a reflection of divine glory.

Symeon’s writings launched a new dimension in thinking about *theosis* as participation in the divine light. His mystical insights greatly benefited the monastic tradition and paved the way for Gregory of Palamas and the development of the doctrine of the distinction between divine essence and divine energies.

St. Gregory of Palamas (1296-1359)

By the fourteenth century, opposition to the experiential dimension of deification reached a head with the hesychast controversy.⁴⁹⁰ Barlaam, A Calabrian Greek philosopher, challenged the hesychast method of prayer and the particular “claim that the human body, and not only the mind, could be transfigured by divine light and contribute

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁸⁹ St. Symeon the New Theologian, *The Ethical Discourses*, vol. 3, 28, 298; quoted in Andreopoulos, 189.

⁴⁹⁰ Russell, 303-304.

to the knowledge of God.”⁴⁹¹ In his view, monks were “intellectually unqualified fanatics” and “navel gazers” who, like the Messalians, claimed to see the divine essence with the eyes of the body.⁴⁹² Barlaam absolutely refused to accept Gregory of Palamas’ claim that the human person could participate in divinity, a stance that he argued in his treatise, *Against the Messalians*. The Calabrian insisted that the intelligible light experienced by the monks was either the light of an angelic nature or of the purified human intellect. To identify it as God Himself was inconceivable.⁴⁹³

Gregory Palamas, a monk and spokesman for Eastern monasticism and Eastern Orthodoxy refuted Barlaam’s accusations in a theological synthesis entitled, *Triads for the Defense of the Holy Hesychasts*. Written as a polemic against Barlaam, Gregory sought to justify the theological foundation of hesychast prayer as a pursuit of deification in Christ.⁴⁹⁴ Gregory writes:

...God, while remaining entirely in Himself, dwells entirely in us by His superessential power; and communicates to us not His nature, but His proper glory and splendour.

The light is thus divine, and the saints rightly call it, ‘divinity,’ because it is the source of deification. It is not only ‘divinity,’ but ‘deification in itself’... While it appears to produce a distinction and multiplication within the one God, yet it is nonetheless the Divine Principle, more-than-God, and more-than-Principle...⁴⁹⁵

So when the saints contemplate this divine light within themselves, seeing it by the divinizing communion of the Spirit, through the mysterious visitation of perfecting illuminations—then they behold the garment of their deification, their mind being glorified and filled by the grace of the Word, beautiful beyond measure in His splendour.⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹¹ John Meyendorff, ed. *Gregory Palamas: The Triads* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983),

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⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, 91.

⁴⁹³ Mantzaridis, 97.

⁴⁹⁴ Meyendorff, 8.

⁴⁹⁵ Gregory of Palamas, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, I, iii, 23, 39.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, I, iii, 5, 34.

The above passage outlines Gregory's conviction that the experience of the divine light is for those who receive it, the source of their deification. Gregory is convinced that God makes Himself accessible to humanity in the Incarnate Word so that humanity may be deified in Him.⁴⁹⁷

As Meyendorff indicates, Gregory wrote *The Triads* so that all baptized Christians would be informed of their vocation to *theosis*. Furthermore, he wanted to assure them that the entire Greek patristic tradition affirms *theosis* as the goal of Christianity.⁴⁹⁸ A strong indication of this belief is exemplified in this passage, "But... we ourselves have heard the testimony of Fathers who have had this experience..."⁴⁹⁹ Rooted in the teachings of the Fathers and in Christian tradition, Gregory's work found credibility.

Gregory's defense of the hesychastic method of prayer sparked continued opposition and debate that affected the Church and society at large. In 1341, two councils were convened in Constantinople that led to the eventual condemnation of Barlaam's philosophy.⁵⁰⁰ A former disciple of Palamas at Mt. Athos, Gregory Akindynos, could not accept Gregory's formulation which follows:

If God were absolutely transcendent, but also could be 'experienced' and 'seen' as an uncreated and real Presence, one had to speak both of a totally transcendent divine 'essence' and of uncreated, but revealed, 'energies.'⁵⁰¹

As Meyendorff notes, Akindynos refused to accept Palamas' teaching on the grounds that God, in his view, was the same as His essence. Any admissible vision of Him was either

⁴⁹⁷ Meyendorff, 1,8.

⁴⁹⁸ Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas: The Triads*, 8.

⁴⁹⁹ Gregory of Palamas, I, iii, 5, 34.

⁵⁰⁰ Meyendorff, 9.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 7.

of His essence or a created manifestation.⁵⁰² Such a claim would suggest that the divine essence is totally transcendent and that God reveals Himself in uncreated divine energy.⁵⁰³ Gregory held that God could be both “supra-transcendent” and “accessible to human thought and experience.”⁵⁰⁴ In this belief, he distinguished between divine essence and divine energy. God’s essence is beyond Godhead, while in His operations or energies, He makes it possible for the human person to participate in an intimate relationship through a vision of divine light.⁵⁰⁵ In 1341, Gregory wrote the third *Triad*, *On Theosis*, as a defense of this doctrine.⁵⁰⁶

By 1347, hesychasm as a monastic tradition and the Palamite doctrine of the distinction between divine essence and divine energy, were permanently established in the Eastern Christian tradition.⁵⁰⁷ Meyendorff summarizes Gregory’s theology in this manner:

God is at the same time the unattainable Essence—because He alone is the Creator, He alone the Uncreated, revealing Himself only where and in the measure He Himself desires—but He is also the Living God, who does actually desire to reveal Himself fully to [humankind] in His Son and to share with [humanity] His own uncreated existence.⁵⁰⁸

Thus, Gregory was able to maintain the transcendence of God and posit that an intimate relationship with humanity is possible with Him in virtue of the divine energies. In 1351,

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 7.

⁵⁰³ Meyendorff, 7.

⁵⁰⁴ Russell, 304.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁸ Meyendorff, *Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 125.

the Eastern Christian Church officially sanctioned Palamas' doctrine of divine energies.⁵⁰⁹

Gregory Palamas and *Theosis* as Participation in Divine Light

The root of the controversy between Barlaam and Gregory is the interpretation of the divine light experienced by the hesychast monks. There is a radical distinction between Gregory's interpretation of the symbolism inherent in these manifestations of the glory of God and in Barlaam's understanding of the light as "a symbol of divinity."⁵¹⁰ Barlaam believes that God's revelation is a created symbol given for human enlightenment and spiritual growth. Barlaam upholds the belief that the utterly transcendent God remains unknowable. Palamas suggests that the symbolic nature of the divine manifestations contains a deeper reality.⁵¹¹ Mantzaridis says of symbols:

Symbols are either 'those which arise from the nature of what is being symbolized, or those which are foreign to its nature...A symbol is either an effulgence from the essence of what is symbolized, or else is completely foreign to it and is only used as a conventional sign.'⁵¹²

Mantzaridis' insight sheds light on Palamas' belief that the divine manifestations contain a symbolic reality with profound implications. God's glory effuses in the uncreated energies of the divine light which arises from the divine nature.

Gregory argues that the vision of divine light sought by the hesychast monks was the uncreated grace and energy of God. His theory is founded on the revelation of God as light that is recounted in the scriptural theophanies. The invisible, inaccessible, incognoscible Deity becomes "visible and participable and knowable in the Spirit"

⁵⁰⁹ Russell, 308.

⁵¹⁰ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, III, i, 11, 73.

⁵¹¹ Mantzaridis, 97.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, 98.

through His uncreated energy.⁵¹³ Thus, the divine light is the uncreated grace of God by which He reveals Himself to humanity as illumination without forfeiting his “transcendent and unknowable essence.”⁵¹⁴ Palamas’ teaching refutes Barlaam’s theory that the divine light experience of the hesychasts is created, physical light.

According to Palamas, an intimate encounter of communion occurs between God and the person experiencing His light. Participation in “this glory of the divine nature, whereby God has communion with the saints,”⁵¹⁵ results in deification. Gregory claims that this experience is given to “those worthy to receive it” by the Holy Spirit, “who by nature deifies from all eternity.”⁵¹⁶ Of this light, Palamas writes:

It is ‘enhypostatic,’ not because it possesses a hypostasis of its own, but because the Spirit ‘sends it out into the hypostasis of another,’ in which it is indeed contemplated. It is then properly called ‘enhypostatic,’ in that it is not contemplated by itself, nor in essence, but in hypostasis... But the Holy Spirit transcends the deifying life which is in Him and proceeds from Him, for it is its own natural energy, which is akin to Him, even if not exactly so... We do not see any deification nor any life exactly similar to the Cause, which goes beyond all things in its sublime transcendence...⁵¹⁷

Gregory asserts the deifying role of the Holy Spirit in the above passage which supports his theory that the divine light is uncreated. The Spirit transmits the divine uncreated energy from His divine person to the human person who is worthy to receive and contemplate it. The light is enhypostatic because it is given from the Divine Person to the human person. The Holy Spirit is more than the divine light, claims Gregory. He transcends it. As Russell observes, the “deifying light pertains to God’s essence but is

⁵¹³ Mantzaridis, 96-97.

⁵¹⁴ Meyendorff, 15.

⁵¹⁵ Gregory of Palamas, *Letter to Athanasius of Cyzicus* 13, *Works* 2, 424; quoted in Mantzaridis, 99.

⁵¹⁶ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, III, i, 9, 71.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*

not itself the essence of God.”⁵¹⁸ Humanity enters into communion with God through the uncreated and deifying energy of God, the divine light.⁵¹⁹

As Mantzaridis notes, Palamas defines the uncreated light as “the glory and energy natural to the divine essence.”⁵²⁰ By nature infinite and uncontainable, it is not beheld through the eyes of the body or experienced through the senses.⁵²¹ Rather, as Gregory states, the power of the Holy Spirit renders the believer receptive to the vision of the divine that results from divine grace transcending the faculties of the intellect.⁵²²

Gregory describes how the Spirit enables such a supernatural vision:

But at that moment [one] does not know by what organ [one] sees this light, nor can [one] search out its nature, for the Spirit through whom [one] sees is untraceable.⁵²³

Through the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit, the illumined are united with the Deity by a participation in the uncreated grace of God. The vision is not a corporeal one, but a spiritual one.

The divine light is the contemplation of God’s glory. This glory is not God’s essence, yet it is divine, transforming the body and the soul.⁵²⁴ The intellect is transformed by the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit that is communicated to the body, divinizing the whole person into the splendor of God’s glory.⁵²⁵ As Gregory writes, “This hypostatic light, seen spiritually by the saints...”⁵²⁶ is recounted in Scripture. As Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the commandments in his

⁵¹⁸ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, III, i, 23; quoted in Russell, 306.

⁵¹⁹ Meyendorff, 15.

⁵²⁰ Mantzaridis, 99.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*

⁵²² Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, I, iii, 17, 34-35.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, I, iii, 21, 38.

⁵²⁴ Russell, 305.

⁵²⁵ Mantzaridis, 103.

⁵²⁶ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, II, iii, 8, 57.

hands, he did not know that the skin of his face had become radiant while he conversed with the Lord. (Ex 34:29) As Stephen was brought before the Sanhedrin, “All those who sat...looked intently on him and saw that his face was like the face of an angel.” (Acts 6:15) As Paul describes his “visions and revelations of the Lord,” (2 Cor 12:4) he writes, “And I know that this person (whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows) was caught up into Paradise and heard ineffable things, which no one may utter.” (2 Cor 12: 3-4) A visible, physical transformation reveals in each of these accounts that the experience of divine glory is manifested by a total transformation of the human person. Having encountered God in the divine light, the whole person is divinized.

Gregory describes this transformation:

...They know by experience to exist, as they tell us, and to exist not symbolically only...but it is an illumination immaterial and divine, a grace invisibly seen and ignorantly known...⁵²⁷ This light is not the essence of God, for that is inaccessible and incommunicable...Sometimes it makes a [person] go out from the body or else, without separating him [her] from the body, it elevates him [her] to an ineffable height. At other times, it transforms the body, and communicates its own splendour to it when, miraculously, the light which deifies the body becomes accessible to the bodily eyes.⁵²⁸

As the divine light transforms and deifies those who experience it in prayer, traces of the divine encounter become visible to those who look on them. As Russell indicates, deification by the divine light is a gift of grace whose transforming power reflects divine glory in a visible fashion.⁵²⁹

As Russell notes, Palamas upholds the patristic teaching regarding the deifying principle of the Incarnation with regards to human nature. However, he also maintains

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, II, iii, 9, 57.

⁵²⁹ Russell, 306.

that deification must be appropriated by the individual through baptism.⁵³⁰ He believes that the grace of adoption received at baptism is that of the uncreated light.⁵³¹ God unites Himself to those worthy of Him in such a way as to live in them and they in Him. Gregory writes, “Through the Son, the Spirit is poured out in abundance”...enabling them to participate in the divinity of God, not in His essence, “but according to His deifying gift and energy, the grace of adoption, the uncreated deification, the enhypostatic illumination.”⁵³² Baptism is humanity’s response to God’s gift of His Son. Through Baptism, the faithful enter into relationship with God and participate in the divine life that is communicated by the Holy Spirit.⁵³³ Outside of Christian initiation, divine life cannot be communicated. Baptism restores the soul to divine likeness and brings the deifying and sanctifying gift of the Holy Spirit...⁵³⁴ “Those who live in a manner agreeable to God, participating in the inseparable life of the Spirit...” receive the promise of a “divine and heavenly life.”⁵³⁵ Baptism bestows an eschatological dimension to the deification accomplished through the gift of the Spirit. Palamas claims that the ineffable glory of the divine light will be more perfectly perceived by those worthy of God’s revelation in the life to come.⁵³⁶

Those who experience the light receive a grace that establishes a relationship with God, while He remains transcendent. Thus, the deifying character of the divine light transcends all natural perfection and transforms human nature by virtue of divine

⁵³⁰ Russell, 305.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, 306.

⁵³² Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, III, i, 29, 84.

⁵³³ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, II, iii, 68, 69.

⁵³⁴ Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory of Palamas*, 160-161.

⁵³⁵ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, III, i, 9, 71.

⁵³⁶ Russell, 306.

action.⁵³⁷ Deification is God's gift to the human person that raises "the [one] deified outside or beyond himself [herself], and accomplishes an "ineffable union."⁵³⁸

Through grace God in His entirety penetrates the saints in their entirety, and the saints in their entirety penetrate God entirely, exchanging the whole of Him for themselves, and acquiring Him alone as the reward of their ascent towards Him; for He embraces them as the soul embraces the body, enabling them to be in Him as His own members.⁵³⁹

Palamas is describing the mutual indwelling of the divine Persons of the Trinity within the human soul, what the Eastern Fathers referred to as *perichoresis*. The love that is communicated among the divine Persons is communicated to the deified one in an eternal union of love.

Taboric Light

Gregory joins the ranks of the "unanimous tradition"⁵⁴⁰ that identify the infinite, ineffable glory of God with the light perceived by the hesychast monks. Gregory's writings reveal the eschatological character of the divine light: "the light which illuminated the disciples at the most holy Transfiguration will continually and endlessly dazzle us 'with its most brilliant rays' in the Age to Come;"⁵⁴¹ "a light that will remain for eternity and has existed from the beginning;"⁵⁴² "the light of the divine Kingdom;"⁵⁴³ and "the garment of...deification."⁵⁴⁴ Like the Fathers before him, Gregory's vision is spurred by the theme of divine light.

⁵³⁷ Russell, 305.

⁵³⁸ Gregory of Palamas, *The Declaration of the Holy Mountain in Defence of Those Who Devoutly Practice a Life of Stillness* 2, *The Philokalia*, vol IV, 420-421.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 421.

⁵⁴⁰ Evdokimov, 299.

⁵⁴¹ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, II, iii, 20, 63.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, III, i, 15, 76.

⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, III, i, 23. 81.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, I, 3, 5; quoted in Russell, 306.

As Russell indicates, the hermeneutical key to understanding the theology of the divine light is provided by the account of the Transfiguration of Christ on Mount Tabor.⁵⁴⁵ Its significance for the tradition of hesychasm after Palamas enabled writers to speak of the “ascetical ascent toward God as a participation in the divine energies and the uncreated light” in terms of the “Taboric Light.”⁵⁴⁶ The light of the transfigured Christ was not a mere symbol, but a divine reality.⁵⁴⁷ In Louth’s view, the Transfiguration is “the clearest manifestation of divine glory” and “the summit of the Christian experience of Christ.”⁵⁴⁸ The hesychasts identified their experience of the divine light with the Taboric light witnessed by the Apostles at the Transfiguration. In their exegesis of the Transfiguration, the Fathers associate Mt. Tabor with worship⁵⁴⁹ and the Transfiguration as a “foretaste of the Second Coming of Christ.”⁵⁵⁰ Makarios notes the parallel between the Transfiguration and the deification of the saints. He writes: “As the body of the Lord was glorified when He went up into the mountain and was transfigured in the divine glory and the infinite light, so are the bodies of the saints glorified and shine like lightning.”⁵⁵¹ The desert Fathers also linked the light of the ascetical experience to the light of the Transfiguration. Other fourth century writers like Dionysius, Gregory of Nazianzus and Gregory of Nyssa promoted the development of the theology of light that

⁵⁴⁵ Russell, 306.

⁵⁴⁶ Andreopoulos, 19.

⁵⁴⁷ Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 116.

⁵⁴⁸ Andrew Louth, *St. John Damascene: Tradition and Originality in Byzantine Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 234.

⁵⁴⁹ Andreopoulos, 61-62.

⁵⁵⁰ Meyendorff, 116.

⁵⁵¹ Makarios, *Homily* 15.38, Hermann Dörries, ed., *et.al.*, *Die 50 Geistliche Homilien des Makarios* (Berlin : Walter de Gruyter, 1964), 149; quoted in Louth, 234.

greatly contributed to Byzantine theology.⁵⁵² St. Symeon notes, “God is light and those whom He makes worthy of seeing Him see Him as light...”⁵⁵³ Their voices demonstrate the theological basis for the theology of light that originates in the Transfiguration account.

An invaluable tool in the development of the theology of light is found in the arts. The icon is considered the as the Scriptures in images that exerts a strong influence on the unlearned. As Andreopoulos observes, St. Theodore the Studite compares the “Gospels ‘written in ink’ with icons ‘written in gold.’”⁵⁵⁴ Both serve to reveal the events of salvation history.⁵⁵⁵ Formerly, every monk who aspired to become an iconographer, was first commissioned to paint an icon of the Transfiguration. This assignment served to insure that his work might be founded on the premise that an icon is painted with the Taboric light more so than with colors. The luminosity of the icon, therefore, would become a manifestation of the “guiding presence of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁵⁶

Andreopoulos claims that contemplation of the metaphysical mystery revealed by the icon is truly a “celebration of the glory of God and the divine light.”⁵⁵⁷ It is at the core of the meaning of St. Paul’s description of God “who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)⁵⁵⁸ The icon reaches beyond the boundaries of language to reveal the Good News to all

⁵⁵² Andreopoulos, 63.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.* 300.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁶ Evdokimov, 299.

⁵⁵⁷ Andreopoulos, 15.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

beholders. In its simplicity, the icon reveals the theological content of the Scriptures in its images.

Andreopoulos submits that St. Matthew's gospel provides the most convincing argument for the theological base linking the Transfiguration with the theology of light.⁵⁵⁹ The evangelist associates the change in the face of Christ and in his garments with the image of light. "And He was transfigured before them; his face shone like the sun and his clothes became white as light." (Matt 17:2) Christ's face and garments irradiated a light that drew the Apostles into the hidden mystery of the Godhead. As Louth observes, such a "lofty spiritual experience" was reserved for the "children of light,"⁵⁶⁰ the three Apostles who were most receptive to its splendor.⁵⁶¹ The Transfiguration account is the theological foundation for the doctrine of the theology of light.

Gregory of Palamas describes the light in the following passage:

The light which shone about the disciples on Mt. Tabor was...ineffable, uncreated, eternal, timeless, unapproachable, boundless, infinite, limitless, invisible to angels and [humans], archetypal and unchanging beauty, the glory of God, the glory of Christ, the glory of the Spirit, the ray of Divinity...⁵⁶²

In his teaching, Palamas argues that the light that shone from Christ did not stem from his human nature. Rather, the light radiated His divinity. As Gregory clearly indicates, this light symbolizes the *divinity* of the Only Begotten:

The Son eternally begotten of the Father possesses the natural and eternal ray of Divinity; yet the glory of the divinity has become also the glory of the body.⁵⁶³

⁵⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁵⁶⁰ Louth, 234-236.

⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶² Gregory of Palamas, *The Declaration of the Holy Mountain* 4, 422.

⁵⁶³ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads*, III, 19, 78; quoted in Evdokimov, 300.

Gregory insists that deification means participation in Christ whose body is penetrated with divine, deifying energy. This is the reason for his belief in the deifying power of the Eucharist. As Meyendorff observes, Gregory argues that participation in the Eucharist brings about the sanctification and deification of the whole human person.⁵⁶⁴ Meyendorff demonstrates Gregory's association of the deifying presence of the Eucharist and the transfigured body of Christ in the following passage:

For on the day of the Transfiguration, that Body, source of the light of grace, was not yet united with our bodies; it illuminated from outside those who worthily approached it, and sent the illumination into the soul by the intermediary of the physical eyes; but now, it is mingled with us and exists in us, it illuminates the soul from within.⁵⁶⁵

Christ's divinity shines through His humanity in the Transfiguration and in the Eucharist. Participation in Christ's Eucharistic body communicates his divine life through his deified flesh.⁵⁶⁶

The Damascene begins his homily on the Transfiguration inviting all to "feast together with the heavenly powers that love to feast!"⁵⁶⁷ He describes the radiant and unapproachable light of Tabor emanating from Christ to the Apostles.⁵⁶⁸ Clearly, John believes that the Transfiguration was the vision of God:

Let us also sing psalms in the Spirit that searches all things, even the ineffable depths of God, seeing the unapproachable light, the Son of God, in the light of the Father by the Spirit that enlightens everything. Now things beyond beholding have been seen by human eyes, an earthly body shining forth divine radiance, a mortal body the source of the glory of the Godhead.⁵⁶⁹

⁵⁶⁴ Meyendorff, 16, 18-19.

⁵⁶⁵ Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads* I, 3, 38; quoted in Meyendorff, 19.

⁵⁶⁶ Meyendorff, 19-20.

⁵⁶⁷ St. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Transfiguration* I, 1-2; quoted in Louth, 237.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, II, 1-2. *idem.*

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, II, 31-35; quoted in Louth, 238.

John's account indicates that in the radiant splendor of Christ, God revealed his trinitarian glory to the Apostles. The humanity of Christ was, for the Apostles, the means by which the divine light emanated. While, indeed, it was Christ's transfiguration, the Apostles themselves received grace to perceive the glory of the Lord suddenly revealed to them.

Thus Christ was transfigured, not by the addition of something He was not, nor by a transformation into something He was not, but by the manifestation to His disciples of what He really was. He opened their eyes so that instead of being blind they could see. While He Himself remained the same, they could now see Him as other than He had appeared to them formerly...⁵⁷⁰

John of Damascus concludes that the glory emanated "from within...the Godhead of the transcendent divine Word of God, united to it hypostatically in an ineffable manner."⁵⁷¹

This light is God's gift of Himself in His uncreated energies. Within its vision, the worthy one comes face-to-face with the mystery of the eschaton and the "state of deification."⁵⁷²

O Christ the true light that enlighteneth and sanctifieth every [person] that comes into the world; Let the light of Thy countenance shine upon us, that in it we might behold the unapproachable light.⁵⁷³

Palamite doctrine resounds in the liturgy of the Eastern tradition as the divinity of Christ is confessed, "For Thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory together with Thy Father...and Thine life-creating spirit."⁵⁷⁴ As the icon of the Invisible God, Christ illuminates humanity with His divinity so that the worthy ones may behold the glory of God in eternal embrace.

⁵⁷⁰ St. Gregory of Palamas, *The Declaration of the Holy Mountain*, 4, 422.

⁵⁷¹ St. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Transfiguration* 2, 38-40; quoted in Louth, 238.

⁵⁷² Evdokimov, 302-303.

⁵⁷³ St. Tikhon's Monastery, "The Office of the All-Night Vigil," *The Priest's Service Book* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 2000), 197.

⁵⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, *Prayer before the Gospel*, 50.

Gregory's doctrine outlines the nature of the union of humankind with God, the unapproachable light. How is it possible for the radically, transcendent and Divine Essence, who is absolutely inaccessible, invisible and incognoscible, to enter into a personal relationship with human creation so that they may partake of divinity?

Gregory's basic tenet, "God is called light not according to his essence but according to his energy,"⁵⁷⁵ is key in the treatment of this mystery. Evdokimov describes Gregory's teaching, considering "two modes of God's existence and presence: 1) God's transcendent essence, and 2) God's immanent energies."⁵⁷⁶ God's energies are not to be considered as a part of Him, rather, they are God in his revelation as He "exteriorizes" and manifests Himself so that human persons can participate in Him. In doing so, God retains His radical otherness and "non-exteriorized essence."⁵⁷⁷ In His essence, God is inaccessible and unapproachable by [humans] or angels. Nevertheless, He enters into a dynamic relationship with the world through his uncreated natural energy, "the radiance of divine nature."⁵⁷⁸

This belief lies at the core of Eastern Christian theology and the teaching of the nature of the communion between God and humankind. Through the divine energies, the human person is able to enter into communion with God, who makes Himself present in a very real way. This communion is not a communion of divine essence or a communion like that of the divine Persons; it is a communion on the level of the divine energies.⁵⁷⁹

⁵⁷⁵ St. Gregory of Palamas, *Against Akindynos*, *Patrologia Graeca* 150, 893; quoted in Evdokimov, 300.

⁵⁷⁶ Evdokimov, 301.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁷⁸ Mantzaridis, 104.

⁵⁷⁹ Evdokimov, 302.

Based on this capacity for participation, humankind is guided towards the knowledge of the existence of God through His divine energies.⁵⁸⁰ St. Basil argues that without energy there is no essence and without essence there is no energy. Through divine energy, humankind recognizes and witnesses the divine essence that it manifests.⁵⁸¹ Palamas writes, "...No nature can exist or be known, unless it possesses an essential energy."⁵⁸² It must be noted, however, that the divine energy, or the grace that reveals God in the light, is uncreated. Union of God with the human person occurs in the uncreated light that deifies:⁵⁸³ Palamas describes the divinizing property of the divine light:

The chosen disciples saw the essential and eternal beauty of God on Tabor...the superluminous splendour of the beauty of the Archetype; the very form of the divine loveliness, which deifies [humankind] and makes [them] worthy of personal converse with God; the very Kingdom of God, eternal and endless, the very light beyond intellection and unapproachable, the heavenly and infinite light, out of time and eternal, the light that makes immortality shine forth, the light which deifies those who contemplate it.⁵⁸⁴

Participation in the uncreated, deifying energies of God enables those who have been found worthy to become a new creation. While retaining their created nature, they now share in the uncreated grace and divine life that establishes a filial relationship with God. Divine adoption renders them capable of knowing and participating in God through His divine energies.⁵⁸⁵ Those who are deified in the divine light become a reflection of the light to others as a gift of the Holy Spirit,⁵⁸⁶ the agent of deification. As Meyendorff observes, the divine light received in their beings does not leave their bodies at death, but

⁵⁸⁰ Mantzaridis, 106.

⁵⁸¹ St. Basil the Great, *De Incarnatione Verbi* 14, 9, 88-89; quoted in Mantzaridis, 106.

⁵⁸² St. Gregory of Palamas, *The Triads* III, iii, 6. 104.

⁵⁸³ Meyendorff, *Gregory of Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 120.

⁵⁸⁴ St. Gregory of Palamas, III, iii, 9, 106.

⁵⁸⁵ Mantzaridis, 112-114.

⁵⁸⁶ Meyendorff, *A Study of Gregory Palamas*, 175.

becomes the source for the veneration of the saints throughout time. Therefore, deifying grace is a permanent quality of the saints.⁵⁸⁷

Conclusion

Theosis, or deification, is bound up in relationality. It is rooted in the theology of personhood that promises a mode of existence whereby the human person finds fulfillment in communion with God. God, in His effusive goodness, creates humankind for the purpose of His glory to participate in divine, trinitarian plenitude; a relationship possible because of the iconic nature of humankind. From creation, the human person's origin and essence has had an inherent connection to its Archetype and is naturally inclined towards its Kin. God endows human creation with the capacity to transcend their natural state as well as a propensity towards perfection and ultimate communion with Him.⁵⁸⁸

By freely choosing the good, the human person determines [his/her] vocation to communion with God in this life and the next. Advancing towards perfection [he/she] grows in the attainment of divine likeness. Contrarily, free rejection of the good, which determined the Fall of humankind, prevents the progress towards deification and severs the relationship with God. The sin of the first ancestors made union with God and *theosis* impossible.

God's eternal plan re-creates the fallen created order. In the person of the Incarnate *Logos*, divinity descends to humanity in order to raise humanity to divinity. In

⁵⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 175-176.

⁵⁸⁸ Panagiotes K. Chrestou, *Partakers of God* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1984), 17-20.

Christ, God and humankind are united. Maximus the Confessor describes this event as the “preconceived *telos*.”⁵⁸⁹

This is the great and hidden mystery. This is the blessed *telos* for which all things have been made. This is the *telos* preconceived before the beginning of things for whose sake all things exist, while it does not exist for the sake of anything else. Looking towards this *telos*, God produced the reasons of beings.⁵⁹⁰

Patristic theology is rooted in this affirmation that the purpose of human creation is union with God and sharing in His goodness and His glory. God’s movement towards His created order reaches the fullness of revelation in the Person of the Incarnate Word. His death, resurrection, ascension, and glorification constitute the fullness of the economy of salvation, and prepare humanity for its own ascension to *theosis*.⁵⁹¹ According to patristic thought, the Incarnation granted *theosis* to [human nature]. It offers the human person a higher level of being than Adam could have reached by human effort alone. Eastern Christian thought concludes, therefore, that the Incarnation is the eternal plan of God for humanity’s deification.⁵⁹²

Theosis is communicated to humankind through the Incarnation, Resurrection and Ascension of Christ and is realized through the deifying grace of the Holy Spirit. The faithful are incorporated into the Church by the divinizing power of the Holy Spirit. As members of Christ’s Body, they receive the gift of filial adoption. The sanctifying and deifying gifts of the Spirit guide Christian living in union with Christ and in the practice of virtue. As Chrestou notes, “...virtue is bound to the Godlike brilliance—it is one and

⁵⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

⁵⁹⁰ St. Maximus the Confessor, Πρὸς Θαλαΐσσιου 60, *Patrologia Graeca* 90.621A; quoted in Chrestou, 36.

⁵⁹¹ Chrestou, 41, 43.

⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, 45-46.

the same as the acquisition of divinity.”⁵⁹³ By continuously and progressively seeking to share in God’s grace and goodness, His light and divinity, the transformation of human nature begins to take place, already in this world, in preparation for humanity’s ultimate destiny of union with God. As Kavasilas notes, “life in Christ is rooted in time but perfected in the future.”⁵⁹⁴ Through the Incarnation of the Son of God, human nature is united with divinity and *theosis* is once again possible.⁵⁹⁵

Theosis is key to Eastern Christian belief and affects its theology at the core. Based on the central affirmation that human destiny rests in union with God, *theosis* as participation in divine life, is the realization of diverse ontological beings, divine and human, in communion without confusion. St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain explains how God’s energies descend to humankind, given the unapproachable nature of the divine essence:

First, the Father possesses the relationship of communicating in His essence with His consubstantial Son and His Holy Spirit, the former begotten and the latter proceeding from all eternity...Secondly, the Son possesses the relationship of communicating in His hypostasis with His humanity; through this relationship He foreknew and preordained His actual union with His humanity in time...Thirdly, from all eternity, God—and especially the Holy Spirit, in whom all the common energy of the Blessed Trinity resides in a special way...possesses the relationship of communicating in His energy with all creatures. Through this relationship He foreknew all intelligible and sensible creatures and preordained their existence. For creatures participate only in the energy and power of God, and not in His hypostasis or essence or nature, since they received their being through the divine power and energy.⁵⁹⁶

Clearly, Nikodimos points to the role of the Incarnation and the Holy Spirit as key to the transmission of the divine energies to humankind. Humanity participates in divinity through the divine energies which do not compromise the divine essence. God remains

⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

⁵⁹⁵ Chrestou, 45.

⁵⁹⁶ St. Nikodimos of the Holy Mountain; quoted in Nellas, 233.

the wholly Other, accessible to human creation by virtue of His divine energies as communicated through the Incarnate Son and the Holy Spirit. Thus, Palamite doctrine enriches the formulation of the doctrinal synthesis of *theosis*. With language that distinguishes between God's essence and His uncreated energies, Eastern Christian theology boldly claims that the invisible, inaccessible, incognoscible God becomes visible, accessible, and knowable through the uncreated divine energies.

Theosis has its roots in Scripture and the writings of the Fathers. Beginning with the creation account, seminal themes of deification begin to emerge. Humankind, created *ex nihilo* is fashioned in the image and likeness of God to enter into relationship with Him. Freely choosing to disobey God's command, the first ancestors separated themselves from Him in a way that made union impossible. Now subject to corruption and mortality, they were unable to commune with Him, to know Him and to be forever united with Him. As slaves to their own passions, they came to know the bitter consequences of turning away from God, who is all Goodness. God, however, continues to will and to execute his divine plan for the salvation and deification of his own by revealing Himself in his transcendent mystery in the theophany of Mt. Sinai. The Exodus account of the deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of the Egyptians, constitutes a prototype for God's plan for the redemption and final glorification of humanity. Psalmists and prophets of the Old Testament continue to sing and proclaim the God who has not forgotten his own children; the One who will save His people from death and destruction. In his ascent to the mountain of God, Moses serves as the ambassador between God and His beloved chosen people. His relationship with God is a testimony to the personal, loving and compassionate God who wills and intends to save His people.

Patristic writings, as demonstrated by Gregory of Nyssa, appeal to Moses' ascent to Mt. Sinai as growth in knowledge and love of God; thus, effecting a transformation which typifies growth in divine likeness. The God who reveals Himself in the light of Mt. Sinai beckons Moses into the cloud of darkness. Stripping him of all preconceived knowing, God reveals His incomprehensibility, filling Moses with a deeper longing for the revelation of His divine glory. Moses' insatiable desire for God reflects the limitless infinity of God's Being.

The New Testament brings the divine plan of God to its fulfillment in the Person of the Incarnate Word. Heaven touches earth in and through the One who deifies human nature and carries forth the re-creation of the created order in the paschal mystery. Through the Holy Spirit, humankind is adopted as sons and daughters of God by grace. Human creation is once again heir to immortality, incorruptibility, and eternal life as participants in divine glory.

The revelation of Mt. Sinai that began in the light of the burning bush, reaches its climax in the great theophany of Christ's transfiguration. Christ's revelation of his divinity to Peter, James and John on Mt. Tabor is recounted in the chapter following Peter's profession of faith in Christ as the "Messiah, the Son of the living God." (Mt 15:16) Moses and Elijah, who longed to see God's glory, converse face-to-face with the radiant Son of God while the three Apostles "[fall] prostrate...very much afraid." (Jn 17:6) The radiant light witnessed by the Apostles reveals Christ in his divine glory. His radiance is a promise of salvation, and a foreshadowing of the final resurrection and deification of humankind. John of Damascus lauds the transfigured Christ:

For He is the true light begotten eternally from the true and immaterial light, the Father's Word existing personally, the effulgence of His glory, the

natural stamp of the Person of God the Father. He is the face that shone like the sun.⁵⁹⁷

The resplendent light of Mt. Tabor is the revelation of Christ as the divine image of the Father, the incarnate *Logos* of God, radiant with glory.

As the doctrine of *theosis* unfolded, the Fathers outlined its sacramental dimension, especially as appropriated in Baptism and Eucharist. Through Baptism, the faithful begin their journey toward deification. The new life in Christ given by the Spirit at Baptism offers the pledge of eternal life with God. Human nature is restored by grace, and the faithful have a share in divine life. The Eucharist sustains and nurtures the life of the Spirit, promising the resurrection of the body and union with God in the life to come. Sanctification and deification are appropriated to the baptized who commune in the Body and Blood of Christ. The Eucharist continues the mystery of the Incarnation. Heaven connects with earth as the divine flesh of Christ touches and deifies human nature. Those who feed on Christ share in the divinity of God. Communing at the Eucharistic table is the promise of union with God that will be complete and perfect in the Kingdom of the Age to come.

Themes of the doctrine of *theosis* begin to emerge in the writings of the *Didache* and gradually weave themselves into the formulation of a doctrinal synthesis. In the early centuries of the Church, Christians were expecting Christ to return. Deification required the restoration of human nature, created for immortality, incorruptibility and divine similitude. By the fourth century, Athanasius, Gregory of Nyssa and other Church Fathers proffered that the *Logos* of God assumed human flesh so that human nature, corrupted by sin, could be restored to immortality and incorruptibility. They also taught

⁵⁹⁷ St. John of Damascus, *Homily on the Transfiguration* 13, 3-7; quoted in Louth, 241.

that through the deifying role of the Holy Spirit, humankind entered into a relationship of divine filiation. Christians baptized into the newness of life in Christ and nourished in the Eucharist, were transformed into a new and glorified humanity. With the teachings of Gregory Palamas and the hesychast tradition, the formulation of the doctrine reached its completion in the explication of *theosis* as participation in the divine light. Gregory of Palamas argued that God makes Himself accessible to humanity through His divine and uncreated energies. This theory maintains that deification in this life is a foretaste of the glory to be revealed to the saints after the resurrection of the body.

Chapter Four will explore how the sacramental dimension of *theosis* draws humanity “into communion with God in the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁹⁸ It will offer a theological and hermeneutical analysis of the Eucharistic theology of Alexander Schmemmann, whose works, this writer argues, provide the strongest evidence in support of the thesis that the Eucharist is the means by which humanity journeys towards the vocation of union with God. The chapter will also demonstrate the organic connection of Schmemmann’s baptismal theology to his Eucharistic theology. Finally, Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision will be articulated within the boundaries of the doctrine of *theosis* to examine how this fundamental doctrine of the Easter Fathers informs, enhances, and illuminates Eucharistic understanding.

⁵⁹⁸ Mantzaridis, 15.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE EUCHARISTIC VISION OF ALEXANDER SCHMEMANN

Introduction

In 1940, a young Russian émigré arrived at St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris to fulfill his life long dream of becoming an Orthodox priest. On the day he entered the Institute, Alexander Schmemmann met Juliana Ossorguine on the Church steps. The nineteen year old seminarian introduced himself to her and was quick to mention, “and do bear in mind that I have no intention of becoming a monk!” Juliana later discovered that Alexander had announced to someone that same evening that he had met his future wife.¹ Juliana recalls this first encounter with her husband to be:

At nineteen, he was already fully that which he was to be all his life. He had dedicated himself to priesthood from childhood. The Church was in his blood, and he wanted to be a priest before anything else and more than anything else. His priesthood, his desire for priesthood, reflected his nature, reflected that for which he had been created...!²

Father Schmemmann lived his dream of priesthood for forty-three years with “his beloved ‘L.’”³ Chapter Four will explore the fruits of Schmemmann’s years as a pastoral theologian.

Although the years spent in Paris contributed greatly to Schmemmann’s formation as a theologian, Meyendorff notes that Schmemmann “always lived in a wider spiritual

¹ Juliana Schmemmann, “Marriage to a Priest,” *Sourozh: A Journal of Orthodox Life and Thought* 25 (August 1986): 26.

² *Ibid.*

³ Schmemmann refers to Juliana, his wife as “his beloved ‘L.’” from Liana, the diminutive of Juliana as noted by Serge Schmemmann in the *Foreward of The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), viii.

world.”⁴ Truly, his life lived in Christ set him free so that, like Christ, he, too, lived “beyond and above all ‘cultures, all reductions,’”⁵ which enabled him to see everything in the light of Christ.⁶ Schmemmann’s vision grew out of the rich soil of his priesthood and transcended the boundaries of Eastern and Western Christian traditions. At the core of his being, Schmemmann was captivated by the Divine Liturgy, and above all, the Eucharist.⁷ Schmemmann notes in his journal:

In everything that I preach, or teach, or write, I want this...answer to appear, hopefully to shine through...It is simply a vision of life, and what comes from that vision is the light, the transparency, the referral of everything to the “Other,” the eschatological character of life itself and all that is in it. The source of that eschatological light, the lifting up of all life, is the sacrament of the Eucharist.⁸

Juliana confirms that her husband’s entire life was woven into the liturgy as manifested throughout the seasons of the Church,⁹ a testimony that supports Meyendorff’s claim.

According to Scorer, the Orthodox world is indebted to Schmemmann for his contribution to Orthodox theology that highlights the true meaning of worship.

Schmemmann posits that the true purpose of humanity is revealed in the liturgical life of the Church, particularly in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy.¹⁰ He argues that divine worship is the actualization and fulfillment of the *homo adorans*.¹¹ It is the determining

⁴ Juliana Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, with an *Afterword* by John Meyendorff (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 347.

⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, “Problems of Orthodoxy in America: III. The Spiritual Problem,” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1965): 179.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ Peter Scorer, “Obituaries: Alexander Schmemmann,” *Sobornost* 6, no.2 (1984): 67.

⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, ed., Juliana Schmemmann (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2002), 24.

⁹ Juliana Schmemmann, “Marriage to a Priest,” 25-26.

¹⁰ Scorer, *ibid.*

¹¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 118.

factor in the relationship that the human person has with God, with others and with the world. From its roots, emerges the anaphoral prayer:

It is meet and right to hymn Thee, to bless Thee, to praise Thee, to give thanks to Thee, and to worship Thee in every place of Thy dominion: for Thou art God ineffable, inconceivable, invisible, incomprehensible, ever-existing and eternally the same. Thou and Thine only-begotten Son and thy Holy Spirit...¹²

Within her *leitourgia*, her vibrant revelation to humanity, the Church communicates who She is in the Eucharist: the Sacrament of the World, the Sacrament of the Church, the Sacrament of the Kingdom and the Sacrament of Deification.¹³ The liturgy is the continual sanctification of time and the celebration of the mysteries of faith. Ordinary activities of life are transformed into opportunities for God's saving grace. It is in worship that the Church communicates to humanity [his/her] true identity as *homo adorans*, created in God's image as pleasing in His sight.¹⁴

Schmemmann's approach to life and to the world grew out of the liturgical experience of the Church. For him, there was no dividing line between what he lived and what he prayed. In the first entry of his journal, Schmemmann describes how he came to realize the true meaning of life:

I felt this reality while walking to church for the Liturgy, in the morning, through the emptiness of winter trees; and then this precious hour in the empty church before the Liturgy. Always the same feeling of time filled with eternity, with full and sacred joy.¹⁵

¹² St. John Chrysostom, "The Anaphora," *Service Books of the Orthodox Church*, I: *The Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom* (South Canaan: St. Tikhon's Seminary Press, 1984), 71.

¹³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 7-8.

¹⁴ Michael P. Plekon, "Alexander Schmemmann: Father and Teacher of the Church," *Pro Ecclesia* III, no.3 (1994): 280.

¹⁵ Schmemmann, *Journals of Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, 1.

Schmemmann was filled with the joy of the presence of the Kingdom that embraced him in every aspect of his life. Metropolitan Theodosius recalls how Fr. Alexander embodied the theological orientation of his life:

At the heart of his approach to theology was the insight [that] sees the living connection between the worship of the Church and the Christian faith. This insight enabled Father Alexander literally to open our eyes to the Eucharist, to what the Divine Liturgy is and what it says and what it means.¹⁶

Fr. Thomas Hopko recapitulates the theological vision of his beloved father-in-law which lends support to the Metropolitan's insights:

Father Alexander's main conviction was that the Eucharist is the actualization of the Church as the Sacrament of God's Kingdom in the fallen world, or perhaps more accurately, the sacramental actualization of the world as the Kingdom of God, i.e., creation as saved, sanctified and glorified in the risen Christ. As such, the Eucharist is the foretaste of God's coming Kingdom, which is the re-creation of creation, or creation as originally intended by God. Father's main task was to restore the eschatological character of the Eucharist, and indeed of the Church, and so, of human life itself.¹⁷

All that Schmemmann believed, lived and taught is summed up in his Eucharistic vision. What follows in this chapter is based on Schmemmann's vision of life and the world that was grounded in the Eucharist.

Chapter Four will probe the Eucharistic theology of Father Schmemmann in an attempt to establish the deifying character that underlines his Eucharistic vision. The chapter is divided into four sections that examine the Eucharist as: 1) Sacrament of the World; 2) Sacrament of the Church; 3) Sacrament of the Kingdom; and 4) Sacrament of Deification. Rooted in the ecclesial tradition of the Orthodox Church, Schmemmann forms the foundation of his Eucharistic vision on a sacramental understanding of the world that

¹⁶ Metropolitan Theodosius, "Amen," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28, no.1 (1984): 33-35.

¹⁷ Father Thomas J. Hopko, interview by author, 7 August 2006.

originates in Baptism and has as its goal the sanctification and transformation of all creation.

In the Orthodox experience a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the sacramentality of creation itself, for the world was created and given to [humankind] for conversion of creaturely life into participation in divine life.¹⁸

Schmemmann's baptismal ecclesiology is at the heart of his Eucharistic vision. Baptism reveals the true nature of humanity as restored in the newness of the life of Christ. As the sacrament of the new creation, baptism endows humanity with the vocation as priest, king and prophet. The cosmic nature of baptism manifests the sacramentality of creation and reveals the world as the place where humanity meets divinity. The Eucharist fulfills baptism and reveals the true meaning of God's creation as fulfilled in Christ who makes all things new.

As the Sacrament of the Church, the Eucharist is the power and presence of God in this world. Schmemmann views the Eucharist as passage and ascent, leading the Church from this world to the Kingdom where her life is hidden with God. The Eucharist reveals the Church's mission to sanctify, to redeem and to transform the world by witnessing to the works of Christ. Schmemmann believes that within the Church's worship and her life of faith, one discovers the key to the transformation of all existence. This principle is the connecting link that gives meaning to all of life.¹⁹ Based on these convictions, Schmemmann sees the urgency of the need to recover the meaning of the Eucharist in order

¹⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 33-34.

¹⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Theology," *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed., Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 51-52.

to reinstate humanity with God, with others and with the world²⁰ in a movement of *theosis*.

As the Sacrament of the Kingdom, the Eucharist leads the Church into the joy of the presence of God in the Kingdom.²¹ Schmemmann notes that the Kingdom is revealed in worship. This experience should encourage the faithful to love the Kingdom and desire it above all things.²² Schmemmann is saddened by those who fail to realize the critical dimension of worship. He writes, “People have forgotten how to understand, feel and realize what Church services are about, into what reality they introduce us, how they create a different dimension.”²³ Schmemmann posits that all life begins, ends and finds meaning in the Kingdom of God revealed in the liturgical experience. In his view, the Kingdom constitutes the Truth that shapes all theology. Therefore, he claims that the Eucharist is the manifestation of the Kingdom of God, the true experience of the eschatological reality holding all life and creation together.

As the Sacrament of Deification, Schmemmann argues that the Eucharist is the partaking “of the divine life of Christ,” “of Life Eternal.”²⁴ Schmemmann observes that the Eucharist enables humanity to realize that Christ is the meaning and purpose of all existence.²⁵ The Eucharist is a participation in a new way of being that glorifies God. Thus, the Eucharist actualizes the destiny of the human person: participation in the divine life of Christ that establishes the indwelling of the Trinity of Persons.²⁶ It is a movement

²⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 85.

²¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 26.

²² Schmemmann, *The Journal of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, 9.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Scorer, 68.

²⁵ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 40.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 39-40.

in love and adoration towards God when the human person returns to the place for which [he/she] was created: the glorious presence of God. The Eucharist is fullness of knowledge, communion with the Father, fullness of freedom, living in remembrance, and the blessed *telos* for which all humankind was called into being. The human person was created for Eucharist, for God as the content of [his/her] life. In the Eucharist, divinity embraces humanity as participants in the divine life of the Triune God.

Eucharist: The Sacrament of the World

Baptismal Beginnings

With the elevation of the holy gifts of bread and wine, the priest prays, “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee, on behalf of all and for all.”²⁷ This offering articulates and constitutes the very essence of the human vocation to sanctify and to transform human life and all creation.²⁸ Its content reveals the ontological character of the human person as king, priest, and prophet.²⁹ Having recalled all the works God has done and will do for humankind in Christ, it is only fitting and just that the faithful offer themselves and all creation to God in and through Christ’s Body and Blood.

Schmemmann notes that in the prayer of *anamnesis*, the Church communicates the essence of her life in the confession of the paschal mystery.³⁰

Remembering this saving commandment and all those things which have come to pass for us: the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the Sitting at the right hand, and the second and glorious Coming.³¹

²⁷ “Anaphora,” *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 74.

²⁸ Alexander Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit: A Liturgical Study of Baptism* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1974), 97.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 95.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

³¹ “Anaphora,” *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, *ibid.*

Within its liturgical framework, the believer is once again offered Christ's new life that sprung forth from the tomb on Resurrection Day. This very life is rooted in the living experience of the Church as She celebrates the rite of baptism,³² the sacrament of the Paschal mystery.³³

Baptism is organically linked to the celebration of Easter. Those who are buried with Christ in its waters, rise with Him into the newness of life that was ushered in by the Resurrection.³⁴ Pascha is the Church's celebration of the mystery of her faith. All feasts and seasons are a journey towards the greatest of all feasts³⁵ that celebrates the end of all that is old and the beginning of new life. Pascha is a constant passage from this world into the Kingdom already revealed in Christ.³⁶ Out of the celebration of Baptism, the Church established a time to prepare for the feast of Easter.³⁷ Every year during Great Lent, the Christian returns to [his/her] own Baptism to recall that unique Christian identity obtained through the baptismal death and resurrection.³⁸ Pascha is the fulfillment of Baptism.³⁹

Baptism is the celebration of the "personal Pascha and the personal Pentecost"⁴⁰ of the Christian believer. As the passage into the new life of the Kingdom of God,⁴¹ it is the sacrament that points beyond itself and this world to its end, eternal life. Baptism

³² Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 12.

³³ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974), 14.

³⁷ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 8.

³⁸ Schmemmann, *Great Lent: Journey to Pascha*, *ibid.*

³⁹ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, *ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

prepares the believer to share in new life and communion with God in this world through Eucharistic communion, and the fullness of life and communion with God in the Kingdom of heaven. When the Church celebrates Baptism, She rejoices in the new life of Christ given to those who seek eternal life in the Kingdom of God.⁴²

Emphasis on Eucharistic ecclesiology in the twentieth century overshadowed developments in baptismal ecclesiological reflection. In a recent visit to St. Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary, this writer spoke with Rev. Dr. John Erickson and Dr. Paul Meyendorff about this matter. Erickson strongly urged "the need for correctives in Eucharistic ecclesiology"⁴³ that would eliminate the danger of a "triumphalist," "self-congratulatory" even "narcissistic" tendency "to emphasize the Kingdom without acknowledging how one arrives there."⁴⁴ One must be careful, he observes, to refrain from "the categories so frequently used in the late twentieth century."⁴⁵ Such categorization runs the risk of a Eucharistic ecclesiology with "little or no sense of mission or sense of the cross."⁴⁶ Dr. Paul Meyendorff concurs with the need to revitalize baptismal ecclesiology. Reflecting on his own Baptism held in the family apartment, Meyendorff argues the need to "restore Baptism to the center of the Church's liturgy"⁴⁷ and ecclesial identity. He posits that there are "huge ramifications"⁴⁸ to an ecclesiology that begins with Eucharistic theology rather than one that begins with Baptism. He submits:

⁴² *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴³ Rev. Dr. John H. Erickson, interview by author, 5 May, 2006.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

If you begin with Baptism, you can talk about levels of communion...and how we share our identity in Christ, even if we are not yet in full communion, as we are called to be. If you begin with Eucharistic theology, you have nothing in between, there is no gradation.⁴⁹

Private family celebrations of baptism rob the corporate Christian community of the depth of understanding of the fundamental mystery of the Christian faith and Christian life. In Schmemmann's view, they stifle the effect that Baptism has to "shape [a] Christian worldview" and to place the baptized "into a radically new relationship with all aspects of life and with the 'world' itself."⁵⁰ Baptismal ecclesiology is at the very heart of Schmemmann's theological vision. As Meyendorff notes, "It was Fr. Schmemmann who introduced baptismal liturgies into the Orthodox tradition."⁵¹ Schmemmann understood the sacramental connection that existed in Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist.

Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision finds its source in baptismal ecclesiology. Baptism begins a journey for the Christian that embraces a way of life and a worldview founded on Christ and directed toward the fullness of the new life received. Baptism represents Schmemmann's use of "preparation and fulfillment,"⁵² a theme that he argues is essential to a full understanding and appreciation of the liturgy. Within the Church's liturgy, this theme manifests the dual nature and function of the Church. It reveals the Church as the "already" and "not yet" of the Kingdom of God.⁵³

...The Kingdom comes and begins when [the human person] meets God, recognizes Him and with love and joy, offers himself/[herself] to Him...the Kingdom is the encounter of humankind with God, God who is fullness of life and the very life of all

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 8-9.

⁵¹ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

⁵² Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 16.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17.

life, who is light, love, knowledge, wisdom...eternity itself...⁵⁴

Clearly, Schmemmann believes that the Kingdom of God is already present to those who encounter the living God while still in this world. Filling one's life with God and His divine life transforms all earthly existence into the experience of the Kingdom on earth. Yet, the Kingdom has a double meaning. It is the desire that God's presence will be desired and loved by all in this world. It is also the anticipation of the future hope that all creation will find its fulfillment in God.⁵⁵ According to Schmemmann, the Kingdom is "the beginning, the content and the fulfillment of everything that lives."⁵⁶ In the sacrament of Baptism, God reveals and communicates the taste of the glorious Kingdom that has already come and will come in its fullness at the end of time. Baptism marks the beginning and the preparation that, in Schmemmann's view, must constitute the deepest human longing. He adds, "[People] experience no fulfillment because they ignore preparation, and they ignore preparation because they desire no fulfillment."⁵⁷ Schmemmann's argument, which is key to Christian faith and Christian living, is the nexus point of his baptismal and Eucharistic ecclesiology.

Baptism, Eucharist, and indeed the whole liturgical life of the Church, are the Church's means of making the Kingdom and its vision present in the here and now.⁵⁸ The celebration of Baptism is an event of the whole Church that manifests the Church as the "passage—Pascha—from 'this world' into the Kingdom of God."⁵⁹ Each time baptism

⁵⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, *Our Father* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2003), 39-40.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 40-41.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁵⁷ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 17.

⁵⁸ Fisch, ed., *Liturgy and Tradition*, 57.

⁵⁹ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 37-38.

is celebrated the Church is spiritually “on the eve of Pascha.”⁶⁰ At each Eucharistic liturgy, the Church makes present and communicates the resurrected, ascended and glorious Christ, who draws His people into the banquet table of the Kingdom of God. She manifests herself as both “passage and ascension into the Kingdom of God.”⁶¹ Baptism and Eucharist are the foretaste of the fulfillment of the Kingdom that informs the Church of her vocation to witness to the saving events of Christ. They constitute the new life in the Holy Spirit of the presence in this fallen world of the Kingdom to come.⁶²

The Cosmic Nature of Baptism

The cosmic mystery of water lies in the duality of its nature as the principle of life and the symbol of death and destruction. A symbolic, universal and religious reference, water is understood to be life giving, purifying and regenerating. It is also known to be destructive and deadly. According to its natural attributes, water generates a religious symbolism.⁶³

During the blessing of the baptismal waters, the prayer of consecration reveals the fullness of the baptismal mystery so intrinsically related to all created matter:⁶⁴

But do Thou, O Master of all, show this water to be the water of redemption, the water of sanctification, the purification of flesh and spirit, the loosing of bonds, the remission of sins, the illumination of the soul, the laver of regeneration, the renewal of the Spirit, the gift of [divine] adoption, the garment of incorruption, the fountain of life. For Thou has said, O Lord: Wash ye, be ye clean; put away evil things from your souls. Thou has bestowed upon us from on high a new birth through water and the Spirit...⁶⁵

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 38.

⁶¹ Fisch, ed., *Liturgy and Tradition*, 60.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 56-57.

⁶³ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 39.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 38-39.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

Baptism restores new life and grants divine filiation to those who are washed in its life-giving and sanctifying waters. Purified in body and spirit, and clothed with the garment of incorruption, the faithful begin their journey toward deification. In Schmemmann's view, one must enter into the mystery of the waters of Baptism in order to be sanctified, redeemed and deified.⁶⁶ The waters of Baptism manifest rebirth into the new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit that is the promise of the fullness of the Kingdom of God.

Schmemmann suggests that the blessing of the waters of Baptism is symbolic of the beginning of creation when humankind stood before the cosmos for the first time, glorifying God: "Great art Thou, O Lord and marvelous are Thy works, and there is no word which suffices to hymn Thy Wonders!"⁶⁷ In this act of praise, thanksgiving and adoration, the priest prays on behalf of all humanity. Schmemmann calls it a "Eucharistic prayer"⁶⁸ and an act that posits the *homo adorans* as free and fulfilled. This rite includes a prayer of thanksgiving in the Preface: "For Thou, of Thine own good will, hast brought into being all things which before were not, and by Thy might Thou upholdest creation, and by Thy providence Thou orderest the world..."⁶⁹ According to Schmemmann, this prayer serves to make all humankind witnesses to creation.⁷⁰

The prayer of *anamnesis* in the baptismal rite remembers the events of salvation history. Fallen human nature is restored in Christ and sanctified in the Holy Spirit. In

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 45-46.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

this way, humanity and all creation are reinstated and become the means by which God is revealed and glorified. Their destiny is clearly to be in communion with God⁷¹

Come Thou now and sanctify this water by the indwelling of Thy Holy Spirit. And grant unto it the grace of redemption, the blessing of Jordan. Make it the fountain of incorruption, the gift of sanctification, the remission of sins, the remedy of infirmities, the final destruction of demons, unassailable by hostile powers, filled with angelic might. Let those who would ensnare Thy creature flee far from it. For we have called upon Thy Name, O Lord, and it is wonderful and glorious, and terrible unto adversaries.⁷²

Baptism creates humanity and the world anew in Christ and the Holy Spirit.⁷³ In the mystery of the water, all of creation is delivered from the consequences of sin and restored to life in God.

Like all matter created by God and given as a gift to humankind, Schmemmann argues that the waters of Baptism must draw humankind into knowledge of God and communion with Him. He notes the consecration prayer used in the baptismal rite:

Wherefore, O Lord, manifest Thyself in this water, and grant that [he/she] who is baptized therein may be transformed...clothed with the new [person], and renewed after the image of Him who created [him/her]...[he/she] may...be a partaker of Thy Resurrection and having preserved the gift of the Holy Spirit, and increased the measure of grace committed unto Him, [he/she] may receive the prize of [his/her] high calling...⁷⁴

The world is given to humanity as the gift that enables communion with God. As Schmemmann indicates, this gift offers “life, salvation, and deification”⁷⁵ to all humankind.⁷⁶

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 50-51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

In Schmemmann's view, the cosmic dimension of the Church and her sacraments is a manifestation of the theology of creation⁷⁷ and of humankind's call to *theosis*.

She [the Church] is a sacrament in the cosmic sense because She manifests in 'this world' the genuine world of God, as He first created it, as the beginning, and only in the light of and in reference to this beginning can we know the full heights of our lofty calling—and also the depths of our falling away from God.⁷⁸

Whether one considers the waters of Baptism or the bread and wine of the Eucharist, the natural matter used in the sacraments represents all of creation and the gift of God given to humanity for union with Him.⁷⁹ As the natural substances are restored in each sacrament, God reveals to humankind the consummation of all creation at the end of time. Each sacramental celebration is a passage into the Kingdom of God and the manifestation "of that ultimate Reality for which the world was created."⁸⁰ As Schmemmann posits, matter becomes the means of humanity's deification in knowledge and communion with God⁸¹ and participation in divine life.

Humanity as King, Priest, and Prophet

Humanity's true nature and vocation as king, priest and prophet is revealed in the ancient baptismal rite of vesting in the white garment.⁸² Schmemmann notes that the rite of the white garment manifests and actualizes what it symbolizes.⁸³

What it reveals and therefore communicates is the radical newness of that purity and righteousness of that new spiritual life for which the neophyte was regenerated in the baptismal immersion and which will now be bestowed upon [him/her] through

⁷⁷ Mathai Kadavil, "The World as Sacrament: A Critical Appraisal of Alexander Schmemmann's Sacramentology" (Masters Thesis, Leuven Katholieke Universiteit, 1998), 104.

⁷⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 35.

⁷⁹ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 49.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 49-50.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 75.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 72.

the ‘seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.’”⁸⁴

The essence of Baptism is to restore and to regenerate the true nature of the human person through the purifying waters of Baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit. This purpose is revealed in the context of the rite of the white garment. In the Eastern Christian tradition, the catechumen is first unvested in a rite that precedes the actual Baptism. This ritual serves as a sign to the catechumen that [he/she] must put off the old way of sin and corruption. It recalls the account of Adam and Eve when they realized their nakedness after the Fall. Schmemmann observes that before the Fall, the first ancestors were “vested in divine glory and light, in the ‘ineffable beauty’ which is the true nature of [the human person].”⁸⁵ Vesting in the white garment recalls the restoration of that true nature lost to the human family by sin. According to Schmemmann, the dazzling white garments of the transfigured Christ reveal the true and perfect humanity returned to the human person in Baptism.⁸⁶ The white robe of the new [man/woman] in Christ identifies [his/her] noble vocation in Christ as king, priest and prophet.

Clothed in the robe of glory, the neophyte is now anointed in the Holy Spirit. Chrismation is organically linked to Baptism and functions as the fulfillment of the baptismal mystery. In the same light, notes Schmemmann, Chrismation is the preparation for the Eucharist, the sacrament that is the fulfillment of Chrismation:⁸⁷

And when [he/she] has put his/her garment on...the priest prays thus: ‘Blessed art Thou, O Lord Almighty...who hast given unto us, unworthy though we be, blessed purification through hallowed water, and divine sanctification through life giving Chrismation; who now, also, hast been graciously pleased to regenerate thy servant that has newly received Illumination by water and the Spirit, and

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 75-77.

grantest unto [him/her] remission of sins, whether voluntary or involuntary. Do Thou, the same Master, compassionate King of Kings, grant also unto [him/her] the seal of the gift of Thy Holy and Almighty and Adorable Spirit, and participation in the Holy Body and the precious Blood of Thy Christ...⁸⁸

Schmemmann notes the singular form of “gift” (δωρεᾶ)⁸⁹ of the Holy Spirit used in the sacramental formula. He observes that this term refers to the Holy Spirit, who becomes the gift to the anointed. To define Chrismation in terms of a bestowal of the “gifts of the Holy Spirit”⁹⁰ fails to grasp the theological depths of its mystery.⁹¹ Schmemmann adds:

We receive as gift Him whom Christ and only Christ has by nature: the Holy Spirit, eternally bestowed by the Father upon His Son and who, at the Jordan, descends on Christ and on Him alone, revealing Christ as the Anointed...as the beloved Son and Saviour; Christ is the Anointed and we receive His anointment; Christ is the Son and we are adopted as sons [and daughters]; Christ has the Spirit as His Life in Himself and we are given participation in His Life...⁹²

Chrismation, therefore, as the fulfillment of Baptism, extends the invitation to the believer to live in Christ who is Priest, Prophet and King. Anointed with the seal of the Anointed One, the Christian proceeds on the journey to *theosis* as a priestly, prophetic and royal people of God, transformed and set apart by a radically new way of living in Christ.⁹³

The Human Person as King

Schmemmann posits that the “first and essential truth about [the human person]”⁹⁴ is that God created [him/her] in His own image as the Omnipotent One. As such, the human person was directed by God to have dominion over the earth and all that is in it.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 77-78.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² *Ibid.*, 79.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 80-81, 94.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 82

(Gen 1:27-28) Bestowal of such royal dignity made humankind the benefactor entrusted to bring the created world to its fulfillment and deification in God. God imbued the human person with a kingly nature.

Schmemmann adds that the second spiritual truth about the human person is the loss of kingship. When humankind abandoned their “anointment”⁹⁵ by a misuse of power, their kingship over the earth was lost. In an attempt to possess the earth for itself, humanity introduced death to the world. Their sin ushered in the need for the third spiritual truth: the redemption of the human person as king.⁹⁶

Christ the King, in his salvific and redemptive role, restores human nature in Himself. Humanity’s kingly vocation is regenerated in the waters of Baptism and the anointing of the Holy Spirit. According to Schmemmann, humanity’s kingly vocation incorporates the call to bring all of creation back to God as an act of praise and thanksgiving for the gift that it is. Restoration of humanity and the created order manifests the essential goodness of all creation and the dignity of the kingly vocation of humankind.⁹⁷ Schmemmann notes that true spirituality consists in recognizing the goodness in all of creation as the ground of one’s being.⁹⁸ Although he admits of a fallen world, Schmemmann cautions that the world is not evil in itself. He argues that misappropriation of the power inherent in the human vocation to kingship causes the wickedness and suffering that betrays the vocation of one’s royal dignity and kingly

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 81-83.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 84.

anointing.⁹⁹ Through the mystery of the waters of baptism, human nature is restored by the death and resurrection of Christ, the King.

Human kingship in Christ can only be understood by the mystery of the cross. Schmemmann claims that in the cross, Christ reveals the gift and the true meaning of the human vocation to kingship.¹⁰⁰ God empowers humankind to restore to this world the life it received at creation.¹⁰¹ The cross is the manifestation of humanity's rejection of God that began in the Garden of Paradise. It is also the revelation of the reality of evil and the finite nature of the world that rejects God. Human kingship is the call to reveal to the world the reality of evil and the absurdity of rejecting God, the Source of Life. At the same time, it is the vocation of humankind to reveal to this world that the cross of Christ establishes the Kingdom in this world and sets in motion the salvation of humankind. It also reveals that the present condition of the fallen world, which is contrary to its true nature, will pass away.¹⁰²

The nature of human kingship is communicated in the "*triduum paschale*."¹⁰³ Schmemmann calls the day of Christ's crucifixion "the day of this world;"¹⁰⁴ the ultimate manifestation of human capacity for evil. The inscription on the cross of Jesus makes mockery of His kingship and exemplifies the absurdity of worldly rejection of God. Yet it is the loving obedience and merciful forgiveness of Christ that wins the victory for this fallen world.¹⁰⁵ Holy Saturday defies the apparent victory of this world as Christ's death

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 83-85.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 86-87.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 88-89.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 89.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

on the cross destroys the death known to this world. The Kingdom of God is manifested on the third day when the Risen Christ conquers all sin, death and corruption.¹⁰⁶ Christ's Resurrection is lauded in the Paschal liturgy: "So great is Thy power that Thy enemies cringe before Thee!"¹⁰⁷ Elsewhere one observes, "Christ is risen from the dead trampling down death by death, and upon those in the tombs bestowing life."¹⁰⁸

The nature of human kingship is revealed in the cross of Christ. The cross announces the liberation of this world from the forces of sin and death and restores the world to its true nature. In Schmemmann's view, the meaning of human kingship revealed in the mystery of the Cross, poses a "radically new"¹⁰⁹ worldview that calls Christians to reject and condemn the evil of this fallen world. The kingly vocation of the human person is to embrace the true meaning of the world as the gift of God given so that humankind might grow in knowledge, in love and in communion with God. This royal dignity empowers the human person to restore God's presence to the world that chooses to make of it an end in itself rather than a means of communion with God.¹¹⁰ Schmemmann's view concurs with Staniloae's cosmology:

The world has no meaning except when the gift of God to [humankind] is accepted. The universe is the vineyard of God given to [humankind] by God...Everything is God's gift to [humankind], a sign of His love. All things witness to, and communicate to us, the sap of God's love, His good will or His grace.¹¹¹

A humanity ignorant of the world as gift succumbs to the slavery of secularism. In Schmemmann's view, when humanity is liberated from a secularist worldview and

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ "First Antiphon of Holy Pascha," *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 153.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹¹¹ Dumitru Staniloae, "Orthodoxy, Life in the Resurrection," *Eastern Churches Review* II (1968-1969): 373.

“has...the taste of the Kingdom on [his/her] lips”¹¹² then they will perceive the world and enjoy it as the manifestation of God, and come to know the freedom of human kingship.¹¹³

The Human Person as Priest

The anointing of the newly baptized is the ordination to the human vocation to embrace the “wholeness of divine creation”¹¹⁴ and to return it to God where, in Him alone, it finds its fulfillment and deification.¹¹⁵

The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit on the brow, and on the eyes, and the nostrils, and the lips, and on both ears, and the breast and on the hands, and the feet.¹¹⁶

Schmemmann grounds the priestly character of the baptized Christian in the priesthood of Christ. Human priestly nature originates in the human nature assumed by Christ. As mediator between God and the world, the human person is called to offer sacrifice to God and to sanctify all of life within God’s divine plan.¹¹⁷ [His/her] vocation is to “to make whole or holy”¹¹⁸ all of life and the world by uniting [his/her] priestly vocation¹¹⁹ with the faculty of kingship. Humanity then becomes a “royal priesthood”¹²⁰ whereby creation’s longing for union with God is satisfied and fulfilled.¹²¹

¹¹² Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 93.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

¹¹⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 76.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹¹⁶ Schmemmann records the words of the Chrismation anointing in *For the Life of the World* (75-76) to demonstrate that “the whole [person] is now made a temple of God, and [his/her] whole life is from now on a *liturgy*.”

¹¹⁷ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 95-96.

¹¹⁸ Fisch, *Liturgy and Tradition*, 134.

¹¹⁹ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 95.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

Schmemmann cautions that rejection of the priestly relationship with God leads to a consumer mentality that strikes at the heart of religion. Self-serving spiritualities seek to satisfy human spiritual needs but fail to acknowledge the human person's priestly vocation to sanctify all things in communion with God. They deny the mystery of the Incarnation and Christ's offering of Himself for the salvation of the world.¹²² In addition, Schmemmann argues that both secularism and consumerism reject the call to sacrifice, and to transform the world into the presence of the Kingdom.¹²³

Baptism and Chrismation restore the priesthood lost when Adam and Eve rejected their priestly vocation and chose to use the world for their own desires. The newly baptized are anointed for their priestly mission, and robed in the royal garment of kingship that reveals their true nature and vocation to bring all created existence to fulfillment in God.¹²⁴ A striking theme of *theosis* underlies Schmemmann's vision of the priestly role of the human person and of the Church as a corporate community. The priestly vocation to sanctify and transform all life and creation is rooted in the Eastern Christian vision of the destiny of the human person, i.e., as *homo adorans*. Human fulfillment rests in a life of participation and communion with God. A life of transformation lived as a constant offering to God makes Christian life liturgical because it is a life lived in communion with God. Meyendorff argues that Christians become a "priesthood of believers"¹²⁵ through Baptism. *Theosis* is the vocation of humankind to bring all of God's creation to its destiny and fulfillment in communion with Him. The faithful are reminded of their priestly nature with each anaphoral prayer, "Thine own of

¹²² *Ibid.*, 96-97.

¹²³ Fisch, *Liturgy and Tradition*, 134-135.

¹²⁴ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 95-96.

¹²⁵ Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

Thine own we offer unto Thee.” This prayer is the true sacrifice of the *homo adorans* who cries out the essence of priestly life in the assembled body of believers in Christ: “We praise Thee. We bless Thee. We give thanks unto Thee, O Lord. And we pray unto Thee, O our God.”¹²⁶ In the act of worship, the human person fulfills [his/her] priestly vocation.

The Human Person as Prophet

Schmemmann proposes that the prophetic nature of the human person is theologically linked to mission. The liberating Truth given to humankind in Christ anoints [him/her] as “witness to Christ who is the ultimate Meaning, Content and End”¹²⁷ of all things and all human destiny. Prophecy is a natural attribute of the nature of the human person anointed in the Spirit that inclines [him/her] to fulfillment in God. Rooted in Scripture, prophecy is the ability to attend to the word of God and to discern His will for creation and all peoples. The prophet is the instrument of the Wisdom of God who perceives His presence in the world and its events. Thus, the prophetic person is rendered capable of referring all earthly matters to things eternal.¹²⁸

In his description of a prophetic person, Schmemmann prefers to use the term “sobriety.”¹²⁹ He explains this term in the following passage:

Sobriety is that inner wholeness and integrity, that harmony between soul and body, reason and heart, which alone can discern and therefore understand and therefore possess reality in its totality, as it is, to lead [humankind] to the only true ‘objectivity.’ Sobriety is understanding because it discerns...the good and the evil...Sobriety is possession because, being the openness of the whole [person] to God, it makes [him/her] capable of receiving everything as coming from God and leading to Him... of giving everything meaning and value.¹³⁰

¹²⁶ Anaphoral Prayer, *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 74.

¹²⁷ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 103.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 102.

A person of sobriety is one who surrenders to the movement of the Holy Spirit in the whole of life. It is a gift of openness to the larger Truth that is grounded in all that is good, holy, and beautiful. Sobriety is the gift of the Spirit that makes all of existence transparent to God. Baptized and anointed in the Spirit, Christians are called to prophecy the Truth that is revealed in the Person of Christ.

The prophetic nature of the Christian is not to be understood as possessing complete knowledge of all things. Schmemmann argues that human pride urged Adam and Eve to desire knowledge and possession of the world apart from God. By rejecting their prophetic gift, Adam and Eve distorted knowledge as a possession and an end in itself with no connection to God. The consequences that befell the human race appear in the form of “false prophecies” and “ideologies”¹³¹ which serve to counter God’s intention for the deification of the entire created world. Schmemmann attributes the failure to live the call to prophecy as evidence of the “all-embracing crisis”¹³² of the late twentieth century; a time he dubs as “a time of *prophetic fraud*.”¹³³ Chrismation is the gift of the Holy Spirit that endows the Christian with the wisdom to discern God’s presence and God’s will in all things. Anointed as prophet, [he/she] testifies to the Truth, who is Christ, by [his/her] entire existence.¹³⁴

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 100.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 101.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 102-103.

From creation, God prepared human nature for the gift of the Holy Spirit by creating humankind in His image. As Schmemmann indicates, the sacrament of Chrismation is truly a mystery whose meaning is revealed in the anointing.¹³⁵ He writes:

It is the imprint on us of the One Who owns us: it is the seal that preserves and defends in us the precious content and its fragrance; it is the sign of our high and unique calling.¹³⁶

Chrismation is the anointing into Christ who is King, Priest and Prophet. Those who are sealed with Christ become kings, priests and prophets whose nature and destiny are to complete the saving mission of Christ. In Schmemmann's view, the gift given to humanity in the Holy Spirit is the entrance to *theosis*.¹³⁷

Baptism and Eucharist: A Holistic Approach

The fluidity of the Eastern Christian rite of Baptism and Chrismation manifests Schmemmann's concept of preparation and fulfillment and the paschal significance of the rites of Christian initiation. Baptism and Chrismation are the true preparation for the sacrament of the Eucharist. The new life of Christ received in the waters of Baptism and the anointing in the Holy Spirit initiates and prepares the believer to become participating members of the Body of Christ.¹³⁸ Schmemmann notes:

The newly baptized have been made participants [in] [Christ's] deified humanity, the communion of divine and inexhaustible Life...They were baptized so that having died with Christ they might partake of His Risen Life...that the Eucharist manifests and communicates in the Church.¹³⁹

Referred to as the "sacrament of sacraments"¹⁴⁰ by the Fathers of the Church, the Eucharist is the fulfillment of the sacraments of Baptism and Chrismation. The new birth

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 80.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 119.

in the Holy Spirit actualized in the baptismal waters, prepares Christians for the personal gift of the Spirit in Chrismation. Through the Holy Spirit, the faithful are united to Christ in the Eucharist and share at the heavenly table where the Kingdom of God is already present in this world.¹⁴¹ According to Schmemmann, the Eucharist is the sacrament that gives the Church her identity. Baptism is the sacrament that initiates the faithful into the Church so that their true identity may be expressed at the Eucharistic table.¹⁴² As Schmemmann observes, in the early Church, the Eucharist was the “focus, the source and the fulfillment of the *entire*...life of the Church.”¹⁴³ The theological and liturgical separation of these sacraments has thwarted Christian understanding and experience of the fullness of each sacrament. Baptism is the constant source of the life of the Church, its true entrance. As the sacrament that fills all creation with Christ, the Eucharist returns creation to “what it was destined to be,”¹⁴⁴ filled with Christ. As the actualization and revelation of the true nature of the Church, the Eucharist is the fulfillment of the baptismal regeneration into the new life of Christ.¹⁴⁵

Schmemmann ‘s holistic approach to worship can be applied to the sequence of the sacraments of Baptism, Chrismation and Eucharist:

[Worship] is a whole, within which everything, the words of prayer, lections, chanting, ceremonies, the relationship of all these things in a ‘sequence’ or order and, finally, what can be defined as the ‘liturgical coefficient’ of each of these elements (i.e., that signifies which, apart from its own immediate content, each requires as a result of its place in the general sequence or order of worship), only

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 116-117.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 117-118.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 117.

¹⁴⁴ Michael Plekon, “The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann’s Theological Legacy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 40, no.3 (1996): 131.

¹⁴⁵ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 117.

all this together defines the meaning of the whole...¹⁴⁶

Experienced as isolated and separate entities, the faithful fail to appreciate the paschal significance inherent in the progression of these sacraments. To this end, Schmemmann calls for a “churching”¹⁴⁷ that will restore Christian life to its baptismal and Eucharistic nature in order that the Church will be transformed into an ecclesial community that becomes what it receives,¹⁴⁸ the new life of Christ in the Holy Spirit.

THE WORLD AS SACRAMENT

In the Eastern Christian tradition, the ecclesial experience of the sacraments reveals the nature of creation as sacramental, a vision that is intimately rooted in the doctrine of *theosis*. According to Schmemmann, “In the Orthodox experience, a sacrament is primarily a revelation of the sacramentality of creation itself, for the world was created and given to [humanity] for conversion of creaturely life into participation in divine life.”¹⁴⁹ He adds that God created everything for ultimate fulfillment and union with Him. This gives the world its natural symbolic nature, its sacramentality.¹⁵⁰ The sacramentality of the world reaches its fulfillment in the sacraments of the Church as the “revelation, manifestation and communication...” of Christ and His Kingdom.¹⁵¹ Thus, the sacraments become the means of knowledge and participation in the divine life that Christ communicates.

The World

¹⁴⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, *An Introduction to Liturgical Theology* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1986), 19.

¹⁴⁷ Plekon, “Alexander Schmemmann: Father and Teacher of the Church,” 285.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 33-34.

¹⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 139.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 140.

Schmemmann argues that the tumultuous situation in the world and in the Church during the latter part of the twentieth century demonstrates that humanity has become blind to the sacramental nature of the world and of life.¹⁵² His perception was not unique to Eastern Christian thought. In fact, as Schmemmann observes, Pope Paul VI addressed this situation in his encyclical *Ecclesiam Suam*.¹⁵³ Recognizing the “contemporary state of humanity”¹⁵⁴ and the mission of the Church for the salvation of the world,¹⁵⁵ the Pontiff called for a “dialogue between the Church and the modern world”¹⁵⁶ that would model itself on God’s Revelation to humanity.¹⁵⁷ In this dialogue, God reveals “something of Himself, the mystery of His Life,”¹⁵⁸ the “real relationship of the dialogue which God the Father, through Christ in the Holy Spirit has offered to [humankind] and established with [them].”¹⁵⁹ Only within this context, he argues, will humanity understand the relationship that God intends for the Church and the world:¹⁶⁰ a dialogue that unites truth and charity, understanding and love.¹⁶¹ According to Schmemmann, there was an urgent need for the Church and the modern world to engage in this conversation.

The Church has always been challenged to proclaim the Gospel message in ever changing cultural contexts. Schmemmann notes that the Fathers undertook this task in their

¹⁵² Alexander Schmemmann, “The World as Sacrament,” in *Church, World, Mission* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 218.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam: Encyclical Letter on the Ways in which the Church Must Carry Out its Mission in the Contemporary World*, no. 1. (August 6, 1964) [database on-line]; available from New Advent.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, no. 14.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, no. 70.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, no. 71.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.* 82.

commitment to the salvation of all humankind. He writes, “Words and ideas were for them directly related not simply to Truth and Error, but to the Truth that *saves* and to the error that brings with it death and damnation.”¹⁶² In their attempt to reconcile the Jewish world with Hellenism, they labored to construct a language that would address its given conditions while remaining faithful to the Gospel of salvation.¹⁶³ As societies and peoples developed over time, the Church met continual obstacles in her attempt to create a language that would engage them in “fresh and creative ways.”¹⁶⁴ The need resurfaced in the twentieth century as Paul VI observes:

The Church...[must] deepen the awareness that She must have of herself, of the treasure of truth which She is heir and custodian and of her mission in the world... The Church in this moment must...find again greater light, new energy and fuller joy in the fulfillment of her own mission...and...find again the best means for making more immediate, more efficacious and more beneficial her contacts with [humankind] to which She belongs...¹⁶⁵

The Church of Rome was immersed in an atmosphere of *aggiornamento*¹⁶⁶ that fostered sensitivity to the mission of the Church in the world of the latter twentieth century.¹⁶⁷ In the Orthodox East, Schmemmann saw the need for a renewed relationship with the world:

We are just beginning to emerge from a long theological era whose main characteristic...was precisely the absence of ecclesiology...which implies... a radical distinction between the Church and the world and therefore of necessity posits the problem of their relationship.¹⁶⁸

¹⁶² Alexander Schmemmann, “The Task of Orthodox Theology in America Today,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 10, no.4 (1966): 183.

¹⁶³ Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Eschatology: The First Nicolas Zernov Memorial Lecture,” *Sobornost* 7, no. 1 (1985): 7.

¹⁶⁴ Rev. Dr. John H. Erickson, interview by author, 5 May, 2006.

¹⁶⁵ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 18.

¹⁶⁶ An Italian term, especially popular in the Western Christian tradition. used to express the time of Church renewal and updating surrounding the Second Vatican Council.

¹⁶⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, “Prayer, Liturgy, and Renewal,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XIV, no. 1 (1969); 7.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

In Schmemmann's view, it was clear that the urgency attached to the need for theological inquiry into the meaning of the Church's presence in the world indicated that, indeed, something had affected both traditions.¹⁶⁹

Historically speaking, Orthodox consciousness was formed in the world of Christians who survived within the confines of the Graeco-Roman Empire. The Church's presence in the world was self-evident in all aspects of life. As Schmemmann observes, however, its "theological understanding"¹⁷⁰ suffered. Both parties together constituted a united enterprise that maintained its own proper rights and obligations, but did not stand without the other. This historical past shaped Orthodox consciousness and worldview.¹⁷¹ Schmemmann accuses late twentieth century Orthodox Christians of clinging to the historical past of Christianity in an effort to insure its future survival in the world.¹⁷² He supports this claim by referring to the practice of attaching adjectives of national origin, i.e., "Greek, Russian, Serbian"¹⁷³ to Orthodoxy:

Everywhere Orthodoxy is experienced primarily as representing—as 'making present'—another world, the one of the past, which, although it can also be projected into the future as a dream or as a hope, remains fundamentally alienated from the present one. Everywhere even the basic canonical structures of the Orthodox Church remain determined by the geographical and administrative organization of that 'world,' whose language and thought forms, culture, and indeed whole ethos, still shape and color from within the present Orthodox consciousness.¹⁷⁴

¹⁶⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Problem of the Church's Presence in the World in Orthodox Consciousness," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (1977): 3.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

The historical collapse of the Christian world was traumatic to the Orthodox because her consciousness was steeped in the belief that the world of Christianity was indestructible and destined to prevail until the end of time.¹⁷⁵

To ignore, indeed, even to deny that such a collapse of the world known to the Christians occurred, raises significant theological issues for the Christian East that impede any inquiry into the meaning of the Church's presence in the world today. Schmemmann argues that the very denial of this reality coupled with the unwillingness of the Church to conduct an ecclesiological inquiry explains why the past continues to dominate Orthodox consciousness.¹⁷⁶ He notes:

It is after the collapse of the Christian world, and because of the denial of that collapse, that the 'Christian world' was transposed and transformed into an almost mythical and archetypal golden age, to be 'restored' and 'returned to' the ideal past, projected therefore as the ideal future, as the only horizon of the Church's vision of history.¹⁷⁷

In Schmemmann's view, the Church's unwillingness to identify the successes and failures of the former Orthodox world imposed an "ecclesiological silence"¹⁷⁸ that has disabled Orthodoxy from making a theological distinction between Church and State boundaries. Instead, the silence has been replaced by irrelevant issues that surface as blatant signs of the need for an ecclesial evaluation that clarifies terms and situates them within Orthodox faith and tradition.¹⁷⁹

The Church of the West also saw the need to reach out to those cultures in the world that have detached themselves from their Christian roots. While the potential for

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 6-7.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

Christian influence exists among newly emerging nations, Paul VI cautions that there are those who are vehemently opposed to dialogue.¹⁸⁰ Urgent humanitarian issues which recognize no distinction between the Church and the world, remonstrate the need for renewed dialogue between the Church and the world.¹⁸¹

Theological inquiry into meaningful Church presence in the world mandates a common understanding of the term, 'world.' Gospel usage of the term has posited an antinomy that has polarized Christian thinking and hindered sacramental understanding. These contradictory approaches have been justified by numerous scriptural texts that, according to Schmemmann, "accept and reject the world simultaneously."¹⁸² The Gospel proclaims with the same authority that: "God so loved the world that He gave His only Son...and sent [Him] into the world not to condemn the world but that the world might be saved through Him." (Jn 3:16-17); and, "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, love for the Father is not in [him/her.]" (Jn 2:15) It is a paradox that allows no choice of one over the other,¹⁸³ only a dilemma of opposite extremes. According to Schmemmann, the world is the object of God's love that He longs to save and to transform. Yet, another vision of the world suggests that a type of enslavement and entrapment to the world allures the human person from God.¹⁸⁴

Schmemmann adds:

And thus the acceptance of the true world, the world as the 'passage into the Kingdom,' implies as its very condition the negation and rejection of that which in the New Testament is called "this world" and the love of which is the sin par

¹⁸⁰ Pope Paul VI, *Ecclesiam Suam*, no. 13.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, no. 15.

¹⁸² Schmemmann, *Prayer, Liturgy and Renewal*, 8.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, "The World As Sacrament," *Church, World, Mission*, 219.

excellence and the source of all sin.¹⁸⁵

The answer to this dichotomy lies in the priestly and kingly vocation of humankind. God calls humanity to receive the world as a gift to be transformed into a means of communion with Him. As ruler over the world, the human person has the authority to determine its destiny. Humanity's refusal to accept the priestly and kingly vocation reduces the world to a medium of absurdity and death.

Schmemmann proposes a Christian vision of the world that offers a sense of wholeness and harmony to the scriptural revelation about the world and the lived experience of the Church.¹⁸⁶ The solution is grounded in a Christian vision of the world that holds the Kingdom of God as the ultimate human desire. In this manner, the theological tension is resolved¹⁸⁷ as both visions of the world ultimately work together when the Kingdom of God is the ultimate referential. The goodness of the world is received as the gift of God given to humanity to transform and to deify. Within the very nature of the human person as priest, prophet and king, the world finds its fulfillment and is manifested as the sacrament that is charged with the presence of the Kingdom.¹⁸⁸

Schmemmann posits that only a sacramental understanding of the world can justify and synthesize both visions of the world. He argues that God gave the world to human creation as food and drink. It was the vocation of humankind to transform the gift of the world into the life offered back to God. The world was the "matter of the sacrament"¹⁸⁹ placed in the care of priestly human hands, a sure sign that God created the world with a

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 219-220.

¹⁸⁷ Schmemmann, "Prayer, Liturgy and Renewal," 9.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁹ Schmemmann, "The World As Sacrament," 223.

sacramental character.¹⁹⁰ In the following preface used in the liturgy of the Roman rite, this priestly character is highlighted:

Father, all powerful and ever-living God,
 We do well always and everywhere to give you thanks.
 All things are of your making,
 All times and seasons obey your laws,
 But you choose to create [humankind] in your own image,
 Setting [them] over the whole world in all its wonder.
 You made [humanity] the steward of creation
 To praise you day by day for the marvels of your wisdom and power,
 Through Jesus Christ our Lord.¹⁹¹

The kingly vocation of the human person is placed in conjunction with the priestly call to glorify God through the goodness of creation. Noting the priestly/kingly vocation of the human person Schmemmann adds:

[Humanity] stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his[her] act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this eucharist, he[she] transforms his[her] life, the one that he[she] receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the ‘matter,’ the material of one all-embracing eucharist, and [humanity] was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.¹⁹²

The above passage synthesizes Schmemmann’s sacramental understanding of the world and the priestly/kingly vocation of the human person. It also reveals that the ultimate destiny of humanity consists in the fulfillment, transformation and deification of the whole world placed in [his/her] hands.

Sacrament

According to Schmemmann, the patristic understanding of symbol is key to sacramental understanding in Eastern Christian thought. By its very nature, the symbol

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Daughters of St. Paul, “Preface V, ”*The Vatican II Sunday Missal* (Boston: Daughters of St. Paul, 1974), 641.

¹⁹² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 15.

leads to knowledge through participation of what would otherwise be unknowable.¹⁹³ As

Schmemmann notes:

It reveals and communicates the ‘other’ as precisely the ‘other,’ the visibility of the invisible as invisible, the knowledge of the unknowable as unknowable, the presence of the future as future.¹⁹⁴

Elsewhere he writes:

If the Fathers hold together in a living and truly ‘existential’ synthesis, on the one hand, the absolute ‘otherness’ of God, the impossibility for creatures to know Him in His essence, and, on the other hand, the reality of [humanity’s] communion with God, knowledge of God and ‘theosis,’ this synthesis is rooted primarily in their idea or rather intuition of the ‘mysterion’¹⁹⁵ and of its mode of presence and operation—the symbol.¹⁹⁶

The Fathers based their understanding of the sacraments on the notion of the symbol. As Schmemmann indicates, this conviction was based on their perception of the symbolic nature of the world from which the sacraments emerge. Therefore, the symbol provided a perception and knowledge of reality by “participation.”¹⁹⁷ With regard to the sacraments, Schmemmann posits that the symbol is the gateway into an encounter with the “hidden reality”¹⁹⁸ which the symbol communicates.¹⁹⁹ The sacraments fulfill the natural order of God’s creation as they make present Christ and His Kingdom.²⁰⁰

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁹⁵ *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “sacrament.”

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 140-141.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 139.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 141.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 140.

Symbol as understood in the post-patristic era

Schmemmann argues that post-patristic theology began to reduce the concept of knowledge of God to an intellection that was separated from the *mysterion*.²⁰¹ This, in turn, affected the understanding of symbol, which came to be understood as “knowledge *about* rather than *of* reality.”²⁰² Symbol was no longer considered as the manifestation of the hidden reality, only its representation or its cause.²⁰³ Schmemmann explains:

The relationship between the sign in the symbol (A) and that which it ‘signifies’ (B) is neither a merely semantic one (A means B), nor causal (A is the cause of B), nor representative (A represents B). We called this relationship epiphany. ‘A is B’ means that the whole of A expresses, communicates, reveals, manifests the ‘reality’ of B (although not necessarily the whole of it) without, however, losing its own ontological reality, without being dissolved in another ‘res.’²⁰⁴

Schmemmann argues that the loss of the patristic sense of symbol eroded sacramental understanding and forever changed theology.²⁰⁵ Eastern Christian rites suffered from “dramatizations”²⁰⁶ and “illustrative symbolism.”²⁰⁷ Liturgical worship began to include dramatizations of events of the past, thus distorting and reducing the symbol to something quite different than its reality. Arbitrary use of this type of symbolism is contrary to the inner meaning that symbolism has in the true meaning of worship.²⁰⁸ External to worship, these artificially imposed symbolic systems have no roots in the liturgy. Schmemmann denounces them as having negative effects on liturgical experience and

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 141.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 141-142.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.* 141.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

²⁰⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 31.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

understanding.²⁰⁹ He offers an example of the Little Entrance that symbolizes Christ's coming out to preach the Gospel.²¹⁰ As Meyendorff suggests, it might have been helpful to explain the Little Entrance as John the Baptist marching in front of Christ as he entered Jerusalem. When interpreted symbolically, warns Meyendorff, "one can attend liturgy without hearing the prayers or receiving communion but still witness the whole economy of salvation. Unfortunately, this turns the liturgy into a kind of spectacle."²¹¹ Clearly, as the symbol lost its patristic understanding in the Church, sacramental understanding began to unravel from the essence of worship.

In Meyendorff's view, Schmemmann's "visceral negative reaction"²¹² stems from the subsequent application of external symbolism to worship as the sole meaning of the action. Although Meyendorff concurs with Schmemmann on this issue, he offers an explanation of the root cause of symbolic interpretation:

Symbolic interpretation developed in the fourth century with mystagogical catechesis. The symbolic was simply another added layer to the various strata common to the Platonic worldview of late antiquity: literal, spiritual, anagogical, topological and typological. When the literal sense was lost, i.e., when prayers were read silently, all that was left to the people was a symbolic interpretation.²¹³

Schmemmann is more inclined to emphasize the effects of symbolic interpretation. In his view, this practice generated a sacramental and, above all, a Eucharistic understanding that was alienated from the liturgical tradition of the East and from the fundamental approach to the sacramentality of the world. He notes:

In the Orthodox ecclesial experience and tradition, a sacrament is understood primarily as a revelation of the genuine nature of creation, of the world, which,

²⁰⁹ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

²¹⁰ Schmemmann, *ibid.*

²¹¹ Meyendorff, *ibid.*

²¹² *Ibid.*

²¹³ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

however much it has fallen as ‘this world,’ will remain God’s world, awaiting salvation, redemption, healing and transfiguration in a new earth and a new heaven.²¹⁴

In spite of its presence and acceptance in Orthodox theology, Schmemmann insists that a symbolic approach to the sacraments disregards Eastern tradition and demonstrates the consequences of the transformation of the patristic notion of symbolism.²¹⁵

Western Influence

No other area of Schmemmann’s work appears to display his “ambivalent attitude toward the West”²¹⁶ as much as his presentation of sacramental theology. Meyendorff admits that when lecturing to non-Orthodox audiences, he “almost apologizes for Schmemmann’s anti-western attitude,”²¹⁷ adding that it is simply unfair to blame the West for all the problems in the East.²¹⁸ While insisting that Schmemmann had no personal issue with the Western tradition, Meyendorff suspects that, as a pastoral theologian, Schmemmann was “ready to use whatever arguments he could use to make a point for the here and now.” For Schmemmann, the anti-Western attitude, according to Meyendorff, helped to communicate his message.²¹⁹

History played a significant role in framing Schmemmann’s approach to Western influence on Eastern Christian theology. After the fall of Constantinople, the East was left with no theological learning centers. Therefore, the Greeks were forced to study in Western centers, such as Venice and Rome, while the Russians were sent to Jesuit academies in Poland. Since the 16th and 17th centuries, Eastern theology, both Russian

²¹⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 33.

²¹⁵ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 135, 142.

²¹⁶ Rev. Dr. John H. Erickson, interview by author, 5 May, 2006.

²¹⁷ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

and Greek, was strongly influenced by western scholasticism. The latter decades of the 19th century witnessed a rise in the historical movement in both the East and the West. It was then that the Orthodox academy rediscovered its patristic roots and began to read and translate the Fathers, just as in the West. Schmemmann's background exposed him to Florovsky's "pseudomorphosis," i.e., the exaggerated tendency to blame the West for the problems in the Eastern tradition.²²⁰ These factors led to the influence of western scholasticism in Eastern theology.

Schmemmann describes the influence of scholastic theology in the Eastern Christian Church as the "dark ages of the Church's western captivity."²²¹ He claims that the Western tendency to analyze the sacraments was in part responsible. During the medieval period, Hugo of St. Victor, in his scholastic treatise, *De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, (On the Sacraments of the Christian Faith) addressed matters related to "the nature of sign and what is signified"²²² in his treatment of the Eucharist. According to Power,

Hugo explained that in the sacrament of the altar, there is figure inasmuch as there are the appearances (species) of bread and wine, but that the reality (res) is that of the body and blood of Christ. He then distinguished three things in the sacrament: the species or appearances of bread and wine, the truth of the body and blood of Christ, and the spiritual grace, which is the invisible and spiritual participation in Jesus Christ, perfected by faith and love in the heart of the communicant.²²³

Hugo's document distinguished "between the visible species, the truth signified, and the power of the sacrament."²²⁴ His triad reads: "*Species et veritas et virtus* which

²²⁰ *Ibid.*

²²¹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 27.

²²² David N. Power, *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 213.

²²³ *Ibid.*

corresponds to *visibilis imago, imago-res* (invisible body and blood), *gratia spiritualis* (spiritual grace).”²²⁵ Schmemmann argues that this document caused the sacraments to be isolated from the Church²²⁶ because they were explained outside the context of the liturgy.

The medieval *De Sacramentis* tends from its very inception to isolate the ‘sacrament’ from its liturgical context, to find and define in terms as precise as possible its essence, i.e., that which distinguishes it from the ‘non-sacrament.’ Sacrament in a way begins to be opposed to liturgy.²²⁷

The influence of this document on sacramental theology poses serious concerns for Schmemmann who argues that sacramental understanding in the East has always been explained in terms of the liturgy.²²⁸ In addition, the special category that this approach gives to the sacraments contradicts the Eastern ecclesial experience and belief in the sacramentality of creation.²²⁹

Inability to agree on a common theological language regarding the symbol presented a major obstacle for the Churches. Symbol, so key in Eastern sacramental theology, met opposition in Western sacramental thinking. According to Schmemmann, the crux of the disagreement lay in the controversy over the “incompatibility between symbol and reality.”²³⁰ He argues that in the early tradition of the Fathers, no such distinctions were made since the symbol was the core of sacramental understanding.²³¹

²²⁴ Edward J. Kilmartin, S.J., *The Eucharist in the West: History and Theology*, ed. Robert J. Daly, S.J. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1998), 121.

²²⁵ Hugo of St. Victor, *De Sacramentis Christianae Fidei*, lib 2, pars 8, cap.7: quoted in Kilmartin, 121.

²²⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 31.

²²⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 137.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*

²²⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 33.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 138.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, 139.

Schmemmann notes that St. Maximus the Confessor, “the sacramental theologian *par excellence* of the patristic age,”²³² uses the language of symbols to express the reality of the sacrament and its mode of presence.²³³ Schmemmann refutes the historical theologians who accuse the patristic use of “*symbolon*” as a “vague” and “imprecise”²³⁴ term. He claims that their agenda to offer a more detailed sacramental analysis brought about a transformation in sacramental and Eucharistic theology that openly denied and opposed the vision of the early Church.²³⁵

Schmemmann believes that the long-standing debate in Eucharistic theology over the “*real presence*”²³⁶ of Christ in the Eucharist was sparked by the clash over the theological interpretation of symbol. He claims that this emphasis was motivated by fear that the understanding of Christ’s presence would be reduced to a symbolic presence. This is possible only if symbol is considered to be opposed to reality, or not real.²³⁷ In other words, Schmemmann adds, the West questioned the capacity of the symbol to manifest and “communicate reality.”²³⁸ Schmemmann observes:

Within the context of the debate the term “real” clearly implies the possibility of another type of presence which therefore is not real. The term for that other presence in the Western intellectual and theological idiom is, we know, symbolical.²³⁹

According to Schmemmann, the emergence of the concept and debate over the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist was the beginning of the post-patristic era in sacramental theology.²⁴⁰

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*

²³⁴ *Ibid.*

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 137-139.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 138.

²³⁷ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 30.

²³⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 142.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 138.

Dissolution of the symbol in sacramental understanding caused other significant changes to emerge. The concept of the knowledge of God was separated from participation in the *mysterion* and reduced to rational knowledge. This means that symbol was no longer understood to be knowledge *of* God through participation, but knowledge *about* God. Schmemmann notes, “it can be a revelation about the ‘*res*,’ but not the epiphany of the ‘*res*’ itself...knowledge and participation are now two different realities...”²⁴¹ This issue also gave way to a debate in the 11th century over *veritas* and *figura*. It was argued that:

Signs did not ‘contain,’ were not identified with, did not participate in, the reality they signified...hence the question...’Is Christ really present, or is He present only symbolically?’²⁴²

Berengar of Tours proposed that the “bread and wine are not the true body nor the true blood, but a figure or likeness (*figura*...similitude).²⁴³ He concluded that the “bread and wine become symbols of the body and blood”²⁴⁴ through which Christ works. His thinking led to a series of questions that exemplify the scientific theology so disdained by Schmemmann and reflected in the following questions: “What are bread and wine? What change takes place with the bread and wine? How is the change to be conceived? When does the change take place? By what instrumental cause does the change take place?”²⁴⁵ *Signum* came to be defined as cause, a consequence of magnitude proportion according to Schmemmann’s thinking. Causality and sanctification were always understood as inherent

²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 138,142.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 142.

²⁴² Kilmartin, 97.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 98.

in the symbol in the patristic tradition.²⁴⁶ According to Schmemmann, sacramental theology is rooted in the patristic notion of symbol. When that meaning dissolved, radical changes in sacramental understanding and experience surfaced.²⁴⁷

In Eastern Christian thought, the sacramental experience is grounded in the fundamental understanding of the sacramentality of the world.²⁴⁸ Christ's institution of the sacraments is an act of continuity of the natural symbolism in creation. As Schmemmann notes, "It is the epiphany—in and through Christ—of the 'new creation' not the creation of something 'new.'"²⁴⁹ The sacraments reveal the link between the *logos* of creation and creation itself.²⁵⁰ Post-patristic understanding of causality guarantees the effect of the sacrament, but breaks the continuity between the sacrament and creation. This thinking sets apart the sacramental system "as a new, *sui generis* reality;"²⁵¹ isolating it from the liturgy into an independent category.²⁵² According to Dom Vonier:

The world of sacraments is a new world, created by God entirely apart from the natural and even the spiritual world...Neither in heaven nor on earth is there anything like the sacraments...They have their own form of existence, their own psychology, their own grace...We must understand that the idea of the sacraments is something entirely *sui generis*.²⁵³

Schmemmann urges a return to the patristic understanding and experience of symbol; a return to the unifying force that has the power to regenerate sacramental theology.²⁵⁴

²⁴⁶ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 143.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁴⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 33-34.

²⁴⁹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 143-144.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 144.

²⁵¹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 32.

²⁵² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 145.

²⁵³ Dom Vonier, *The Key to the Doctrine of the Eucharist* 41-3, Cf n.1.; quoted in Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 32.

²⁵⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 146-147.

He challenges Eastern Christian theology to free itself from the captivity that forced the sacrament to distance itself from its ontological foundation in the symbol. Finally, in an effort to retrieve the cosmic, ecclesial, and eschatological nature of the sacrament, Schmemmann posits that in the liturgical experience, the world, the Church, and the Kingdom of God come together as a living reality.²⁵⁵

The Eucharist: the Fulfillment of the Sacramentality of the World

The world is the medium of the encounter of humanity with the Divine. Its sacramental character lies in its nature as a gift of life. God creates the world for humanity to transform it into life offered back to God as gift.²⁵⁶ God sanctifies and transforms this gift given back to humanity as the food of new and eternal life to the world: Eucharist, the food that sanctifies, redeems and deifies the whole of life.²⁵⁷

Schmemmann's sacramental understanding of the world reaches its fulfillment in the Eucharist. Ordinary and natural food is transformed into divine food and given to humanity as a "new state of being, [a] new style of life which is Eucharist, the only real life of creation with God and in God, the only true relationship between God and the world."²⁵⁸ Schmemmann adds that creation realizes its true meaning and purpose in the Eucharist.²⁵⁹ Christ, the Eucharist of the world, re-creates creation, restoring it to its true nature as sacramental.²⁶⁰

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

²⁵⁶ Schmemmann, "The World As Sacrament," 223.

²⁵⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Missionary Imperative," *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1979), 216.

²⁵⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 39.

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 38.

²⁶⁰ Schmemmann, "The World As Sacrament," 224.

The sacramental sense of the world was lost when humanity failed to accomplish its priestly vocation of offering the world to God; the act that gives meaning and purpose to life. Sin abandoned the world as sacrament and exposed the world as fallen.²⁶¹

Sin is itself perceived here as a falling away of [humankind], and in [him/her] of all creation, from this sacramentality, from the 'paradise of delight.' And into 'this world,' which lives no longer according to God, but according to itself and in itself and is therefore corrupt and mortal.²⁶²

Schmemmann adds that the first sin consists in the failure of Adam and Eve to live a Eucharistic life in a Eucharistic world; a world [he/she] was to fill with meaning by transforming it into an intimate dialogue and communion with God. Schmemmann argues that humanity lost its hunger for God as their only satisfaction and the world as the means of union with Him.²⁶³

Christ, the Priest, restores the priestly nature lost through sin. Christ's perfect sacrifice on the cross, renews the entire created world and offers it to God as redeemed and saved.²⁶⁴ Christ's death on the cross becomes the perfect sacrifice because of Christ's perfect love. Furthermore, it is a sacrifice that satisfies humanity's eternal hunger and thirst for God.²⁶⁵ By the cross, Christ reveals to humanity the true essence of their priestly vocation: to make one's entire life a living sacrifice to God, holy and pleasing in His sight. The priestly nature of humanity lost to sin is made whole by the deified humanity of the Incarnate Christ.²⁶⁶

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 223,225.

²⁶² Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 34.

²⁶³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 18.

²⁶⁴ Schmemmann, "The World As Sacrament," *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 104.

²⁶⁶ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 95, 97.

The Eucharist is the ultimate offering of the holy, royal and prophetic priesthood of humanity. It is the “saving commandment”²⁶⁷ for the sanctification, redemption and deification of the whole world. “We offer to You, God of glory and majesty, this holy and perfect sacrifice: the bread of life and the cup of eternal salvation.”²⁶⁸ In Christ, all things are united, “things in heaven and things on earth.” (Ephesians 1:10)²⁶⁹ Bread and wine represent all creation as a manifestation of God’s gift of the world to humanity as food and drink.

Blessed are You, Lord, God of all creation. Through your goodness we have this bread to offer, which earth has given and human hands have made...Blessed are You, Lord, God of all creation, through your goodness we have this wine to offer, fruit of the vine and work of human hands.²⁷⁰

The offering of the bread and wine is an act that embraces both creation and the consummation of the world at once. It is the old made new, preparation and fulfillment, the passage and the Kingdom. Placed on the altar as an offering of humanity and the whole world, the bread of the earth and fruit of the vine reveal truth of the eternal plan of God²⁷¹ who nourishes humanity with divine love and calls his creation to share in His life.

Eucharist reveals the true meaning of God’s creation as fulfilled in Christ who makes all things new.²⁷² Bread and wine, the food and principle of life, are offered to God as a sign of the totality of the life of humankind.²⁷³ It is the sacrament that affirms the goodness of creation and the dignity of the one created in the image of the Creator.

²⁶⁷ Anaphoral Prayer, *Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 74.

²⁶⁸ Eucharistic Prayer I, *The Vatican II Sunday Missal*, 604.

²⁶⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 105.

²⁷⁰ Liturgy of the Eucharist, *The Vatican II Sunday Missal*, 598.

²⁷¹ Schmemmann, “The World As Sacrament, 225-226.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 222.

²⁷³ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 34.

The Eucharist enables the passage beyond the veil separating humanity from God.²⁷⁴ It is the sacrament that reminds humankind of the dignity of their vocation to transform creation in an act of returning it to God as gift. “Thine own of Thine own...on behalf of all and for all.”²⁷⁵ Eucharist manifests that real life is an act of love and adoration that advances to God.²⁷⁶

Schmemmann notes:

It [Eucharist] is a movement of adoration and praise in which all joy and suffering, all beauty and all frustration, all hunger and all satisfaction are referred to their Ultimate End and become finally meaningful.²⁷⁷

Eucharist always points beyond the fallen world as the movement and passage into participation of the world to come: the anaphora that lifts the world to God.²⁷⁸

The world is the revelation of God’s love for humankind. In Schmemmann’s view, the world is the “icon” that draws humanity into relationship with God.²⁷⁹ As God’s gift, the world manifests and communicates life destined for communion with God.²⁸⁰ Humanity responds to God’s love in a reciprocal offering of the gift given to them. It is the human movement towards God that continues the loving conversation initiated by God. God returns the offered gifts that are now imbued with the principle of life and love. The ultimate gift, the Eucharist, transforms and spiritualizes so that the whole world is filled with God.²⁸¹

²⁷⁴ Schmemmann, “The World as Sacrament,” 222.

²⁷⁵ Elevation of the Holy Gifts, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 74.

²⁷⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, *ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 35.

²⁷⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 42.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 177.

²⁸⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14-15.

²⁸¹ Dumitru Staniloae, “Orthodoxy, Life in the Resurrection,” *Eastern Churches Review* II (1968-9): 373-374.

Earth unites with heaven to sing the new song of creation as we adore and praise You forever!²⁸² Holy, holy, holy Lord, God of power and might, heaven and earth are full of your glory!²⁸³

Eucharist is God's love made into the food that gives Life to the world.²⁸⁴

Eucharist: The Sacrament of the Church

Schmemmann was highly influenced by the twentieth century pioneers of liturgical renewal and Eucharistic ecclesiology. Among Western theologians, Schmemmann was influenced by Bouyer, Congar and Daniélou. Like them, he associated with the ecclesial and liturgical revival that had surfaced at the time.²⁸⁵ Scholars in the Eastern tradition were also interested in ecclesial and Eucharistic reform. Bulgakov, Florovsky, Afanasiev, Kern, John Meyendorff, Lossky and Evdokimov also contributed to Schmemmann's thought. Particularly influential in his theological development of the Eucharist was Fr. Kiprian Kern, a former teacher of Schmemmann.²⁸⁶ In a treatise on the Eucharist, Kern recalls St. Irenaeus' maxim: "Our teaching is conformed to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist confirms our teaching."²⁸⁷ Kern expanded on this truth in the following text: "to recover the true place and meaning of the Eucharist is to recover the Church, and to recover the Church entails recovering the Eucharist."²⁸⁸ Kern's observation would

²⁸² Preface: Holy Eucharist II, *The Vatican II Sunday Missal*, 645.

²⁸³ Acclamation, *ibid.*, 601.

²⁸⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14-15.

²⁸⁵ Plekon, "Alexander Schmemmann: Father and Teacher of the Church," 276.

²⁸⁶ Plekon, "The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann's Theological Legacy," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 40, no.3 (1996): 128.

²⁸⁷ St. Irenaeus, *Irenaeus Against Heresies*, IV, 18,5; quoted in Michael Plekon, "The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann's Theological Legacy," 129.

²⁸⁸ Plekon, *ibid.*

spark a flame in Schmemmann's soul that would later fan out into Schmemmann's

Eucharistic vision of the Church and of the world.

In his journal, Schmemmann writes of Kern:

[He] accompanied me through my theological studies at St. Sergius Institute in Paris and was primarily a friend...How much more important is a personal encounter, a mutual, personal love, than a purely intellectual influence.²⁸⁹

It comes as no surprise that Schmemmann dedicated his first monograph to Kern, including in it a passage from Kern's text on the Eucharist. It reads as follows:

If in our time eucharistic life is weakened to the point that we have almost completely lost the proper eucharistic consciousness, and regard the Divine Liturgy being celebrated in our churches as just one of the ceremonies, considering secondary devotional services as no less important in worship, then in the times of genuine ecclesiastical life it was not so. The Eucharist was the basis and culmination of all liturgical life. But gradually everything that was concentrated around the Eucharist as the center of liturgical life—the sacraments, prayers, orders of service...were turned in the consciousness of Christians into private rites, became the private business of each individual person or family, having (apparently) nothing to do with the concept of the gathered community.²⁹⁰

Kern's Eucharistic insight planted a seed in Schmemmann that would sprout

a Eucharistic vision that illuminates and reveals the truth about God, humankind and the world.²⁹¹

According to Schmemmann, both Eastern and Western Christianity saw the need to recover the relationship between the Eucharist and the Church. The identity of the Church as a Eucharistic community had given way to an individualistic piety and an

²⁸⁹ Schmemmann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, "53.

²⁹⁰ Kiprian Kern, *Evkharistiya*, 25ff; quoted in Plekon, "The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann's Theological Legacy," 129.

²⁹¹ Alexander Schmemmann, "Theology and Eucharist," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 5, no.4 (1961): 22.

institutionalization of the Church that tore at her very roots.²⁹² Schmemmann addressed this problem in a 1971 report to the Synod of Bishops of the Orthodox Church of America (OCA).²⁹³ In his document, “Holy Things for the Holy,” Schmemmann attacks Orthodox Church life as a “religionless religion.”²⁹⁴ In addition to exposing the presence and dangers of secularism in America and in Church life, he identifies several problems that demean the true essence of the life of the Church.²⁹⁵ He cites the following issues:

- 1) “preoccupation with “material, organizational and legalistic concerns;”
- 2) “indifference to the missionary, educational and charitable needs of the Church;”
- 3) “passive...resistance to all efforts to deepen the spiritual and liturgical life;”
- 4) “identification of religion and ethnic folklore and ...customs;”
- 5) “self-centeredness and ...isolation of so many parishes...”²⁹⁶

Schmemmann saw the dangers inherent in the preoccupation with institutional matters that would reduce the nature of the Church and her mission to sanctify and transform the world. He also challenged the Orthodox Church to rediscover her identity as a liturgical community whose arms extend beyond nationalism and ethnicity. Schmemmann also cautions against a Western mentality that reduces the Eucharist to one of the sacraments. He argues that an institutional mentality suggests that the Church has the power to make the Eucharist possible as a means of grace. This thinking, he notes, institutionalizes the Church, making her a structure that communicates grace, and whose fruit is the Eucharist. Instead of building up the Church, the Eucharist serves the personal needs of her

²⁹² Plekon, “The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann’s Theological Legacy,” 129-130.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 129.

²⁹⁴ Schmemmann, *Great Lent*, 109.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 110.

²⁹⁶ Schmemmann, “Holy Things for the Holy;” quoted in *Great Lent*, 110.

members and is reduced to an individual act of piety. Schmemmann blames the subordination of the Eucharist to the Church on a theology that isolates her from the sacraments. It is a theological approach that fosters an ecclesial identity based on the liturgical functions that satisfy the spiritual needs of her members.²⁹⁷ Clearly, Schmemmann recognized the consequences of an ecclesial and Eucharistic crisis that were stretching beyond the confines of Orthodoxy.

According to Schmemmann, the ecclesiological dimension of the Eucharist is the very source of the Church's theology, the “*locus theologicus*’ *par excellence*.”²⁹⁸ The Eucharistic liturgy, he notes, manifests that the Church is the sacrament to the world of the presence of the Kingdom.²⁹⁹ The liturgical experience of Eucharist, posits Schmemmann, is the mystery:

which reveals and communicates before it “explains;” which makes us witness and participants of one all-embracing Event from which stems everything else: understanding and power, knowledge and joy, contemplation and communion.³⁰⁰

It is the event that becomes God's message of Truth.³⁰¹ Within the liturgical experience, the mysteries and the content of the faith find expression.³⁰² As Schmemmann posits, if theology is the expression of the Truth, then theology must find its source in the liturgy where that Truth is “revealed,” “given,” “accepted,” and “lived.”³⁰³ The central and basic act, the source of all theology and ecclesiology is the Eucharist.

²⁹⁷ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 12-13.

²⁹⁸ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, “Debate on the Liturgy,” 218-219.

²⁹⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Theology,” *The Greek Orthodox Theological Review* XVII, no.1 (1972); 97.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 21.

³⁰² Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, “Debate on the Liturgy,” *ibid.*

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 219.

The Eucharist: The True Form of the Church³⁰⁴

Schmemmann tirelessly advanced the Eucharist as the heart of the Church. Throughout his writings, he makes use of various Eucharistic categorizations that highlight the ecclesial dimension of the sacrament. The Eucharist is the “sacrament of sacraments,”³⁰⁵ the true revelation and manifestation of the Church.³⁰⁶ The Eucharist is a passage from this world to the Kingdom of God: the *anaphora* of the Church. In the Eucharist, the Church ascends to heaven where all meaning and purpose are revealed in transformation and communion with God.³⁰⁷ As Plekon observes, Schmemmann’s vision of the centrality of the Eucharist embraced the ecclesial dimension of the Eucharist, the nature of the Church and Christian life as Eucharistic.³⁰⁸ He submits that Schmemmann’s contribution to the universal Church consisted of the “recovery...of the Church’s rationale for being...”³⁰⁹ which he posited in the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Eastern Christians have often described the ecclesial liturgical experience as “heaven on earth.”³¹⁰ First and foremost, they acknowledge the divine origin of this gift of God that makes the new life of Christ and the new age of the Holy Spirit ever present. The Church is the “eschatological reality”³¹¹ that manifests the Kingdom of God in this

³⁰⁴ Alexander Schmemmann, “Ecclesiological Notes,” *St. Vladimir’s Seminary Quarterly* II (1967): 37.

³⁰⁵ Schmemmann, “Theology and the Eucharist,” 17.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 21.

³⁰⁷ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 37, 43.

³⁰⁸ Plekon, “The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann’s Theological Legacy,” 131.

³⁰⁹ Plekon, “Alexander Schmemmann: Father and Teacher of the Church,” 276.

³¹⁰ Alexander Schmemmann, “The Missionary Imperative,” *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 211.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*

world.³¹² It does so specifically in the Eucharist by communicating the saving works of Christ and the grace of the Holy Spirit.³¹³ The Eucharist reveals the *logos* and the destiny of all things in Christ, in whom humanity participates in divine life.³¹⁴

Schmemmann submits that the Church is the sacramental reality of the presence of God and His Kingdom on earth. This reality is communicated to the faithful in the Eucharist. It is the sacrament of the Church that identifies her as Christ's Body and the Dwelling of the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Church must strive to fulfill herself as the fullness of divine presence and grace.³¹⁵ As Schmemmann notes, "For grace is another name for the Church in the state of fulfillment as the manifestation of the age of the Holy Spirit."³¹⁶ The ecclesial nature of the Eucharist demonstrates that the Eucharist is uniquely the sacrament that fulfills the Church³¹⁷ as the power and presence of God in this world. Christ's Eucharistic presence fulfills creation and inaugurates the Kingdom.³¹⁸

According to Schmemmann, a defined ecclesiology is not apparent in the writings of the Fathers. Tendencies to reconstruct patristic ecclesiology have often been more reflective of contemporary trends, rather than the actual concern of the Fathers.³¹⁹ What many scholars have failed to perceive, submits Schmemmann, is the significance of the

³¹² *Ibid.*, 212.

³¹³ Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Theology," 91.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 94.

³¹⁵ Schmemmann, "The Missionary Imperative," 212.

³¹⁶ Schmemmann, "Theology and Eucharist," 18.

³¹⁷ Plekon, *The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann's Theological Legacy*, 133.

³¹⁸ Schmemmann, "Ecclesiological Notes," 37.

³¹⁹ Schmemmann, "Theology and Eucharist," 14.

liturgical experience that constitutes the link between the Church and the Eucharist as the source of patristic ecclesiology. Schmemmann adds:

For the Fathers, this connection is not something to be theologically established, defined and proved, but the source making theology itself possible. They rarely speak of the Church and of liturgy in explicit terms because for them they are not an ‘object’ of theology but its ontological foundation, the epiphany, the reality, the self-evidence of that to which then in their writings they ‘bear testimony.’³²⁰

True patristic ecclesiology looks to the new life in Christ that restores, transforms, and recreates humanity.³²¹ As Schmemmann notes, it is new life given in and through the Church that lives in the Christian “with a life more real than the heart which is beating in his breast or the blood flowing in his veins,”³²² a life that defies definition.

According to Schmemmann, the Church of the early Fathers saw herself as cosmic and eschatological.³²³ The Church is cosmic because it is the sacrament of the new creation. Through her liturgy, She embraces all God’s creation and restores it to Him. The Church, in turn, manifests the restored creation in this world as it was in the beginning.³²⁴ The Church is eschatological because She is the manifestation and the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world.³²⁵ As “the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen,” (Heb 11:1) the Church manifests the approaching Kingdom and the truth that all creation has been redeemed in Christ.³²⁶ Based on their

³²⁰ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, “Debate on the Liturgy,” 221.

³²¹ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 14-15.

³²² Alexander Schmemmann, “On the Western Confession of Faith,” *Ultimate Questions*, 50; quoted in Plekon, “The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann’s Theological Legacy,” 131.

³²³ Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Theology,” 92.

³²⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 35.

³²⁵ Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Theology,” *ibid.*

³²⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, *ibid.*

eschatological and cosmic experience of the liturgy, the first Christians found their source of mission and the ultimate moral standard of Christian living.³²⁷

Schmemmann observes how the cosmic and eschatological characters of the Church are manifested within the liturgical *ordo*. The cycles and rhythm of worship, the hymnography, the rites and the iconography interface to orient the faithful toward the Kingdom of God. The eschatological dimension of the Church and all theology is “a spirit which permeates and inspires from inside the whole thought and life of the Church.”³²⁸ It is a spirit that is echoed by the hymn:

O Christ! Great and most holy Pascha! O Wisdom, Word, and Power of God!
Grant that we may more perfectly partake of Thee in the never-ending Day of Thy Kingdom.³²⁹

When the faithful gather at the Lord’s table to celebrate and participate in the saving mysteries of Christ, they manifest the transformation and fulfillment of all creation in Christ and the presence of the Kingdom already in this world. Above all, the Church Eucharistic announces to the world that the Kingdom of God is the ultimate direction and purpose of life.³³⁰

Passage and Ascent

Key to Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision is the theme of the Divine Liturgy as a movement of passage and ascent. It comes as a response to the introduction of the consecratory formula by western scholastic theology, which, he claims, defined the

³²⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, “Renewal,” *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 152.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 153-154.

³²⁹ “Hymns of the Resurrection,” *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 92.

³³⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 40.

causality and the moment of change of the Eucharistic bread and wine³³¹. The harmful effects of taking the words of consecration out of their context and setting them apart as a self-contained unit have, in his estimation, isolated the sacrament from its liturgical roots.³³² Subsequently, the Eucharist is divorced from its cosmic, ecclesiological and eschatological meaning and is reduced to a single moment and an independent act. The danger inherent in this approach to Eucharistic understanding is that the Church is viewed as the cause that effects the Eucharist. Schmemmann denounces this thinking and insists on a reversal. “It is not the Church that exists for, or ‘generates,’ the liturgy, it is the Eucharist which, in a very real sense, ‘generates’ the Church, makes her to be what She is.”³³³ A Eucharistic theology restricted to formulas that accomplish and validate the sacrament,³³⁴ rob the faithful from the experience of the Eucharistic liturgy as a movement of passage and ascent.³³⁵

According to Schmemmann, the Eucharist is an “act of passage”³³⁶ that leads and moves the Church from this world “into her fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.”³³⁷ Just as the Chosen People of the Old Covenant passed over into the New Covenant, the Eucharistic *ecclesia* moves from this world and ascends to the world to come. The old and fallen world that She embodies is made new and transformed into the Body of Christ. Through her, all creation is sanctified, redeemed and deified.³³⁸ Schmemmann knits

³³¹ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

³³² *Ibid.*, 29.

³³³ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 16-17.

³³⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 28.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 27-28.

³³⁶ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 16.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

³³⁸ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 15-16, 19.

together each aspect of the Eucharistic *ordo* in order to demonstrate the fluid and integral nature of the Eucharist as the passage and ascent into the Kingdom of God.

Schmemmann posits that the movement of the Divine Liturgy begins with the gathering of the faithful. Those who assemble for the purpose of celebrating the Eucharist constitute the Church.³³⁹ Critical to Schmemmann's Eucharistic understanding is the fundamental connection between the Lord's Day, the Eucharist and the *ecclesia*. According to Schmemmann, this liturgical tradition articulated the Christian vision of the early Church as deeply intertwined with the world and the Kingdom.³⁴⁰ The act of assembling points to the essence and meaning of Church: "the gathering together of heaven and earth and all creation in Christ."³⁴¹ Schmemmann's reference to the unifying act of assembly as sacrament, indicates how the assembly visibly manifests the Church that gathers around Christ.

The opening prayer of the Divine Liturgy reveals the Kingdom of God as the end and fulfillment of the Eucharistic celebration: "Blessed is the Kingdom of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages."³⁴² This blessing articulates the movement of the Eucharist as passage and ascent: the ascent of the Church to the banquet table of the Lord in the Kingdom.³⁴³ It also defines the Kingdom of God as the content of Christian faith.³⁴⁴ To bless the Kingdom is to confess that its presence is already being realized.³⁴⁵ Schmemmann grounds his argument of passage and ascent on

³³⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 11.

³⁴⁰ Grisbrooke and Schmemmann, "Debate on the Liturgy," 219.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁴² "Opening Prayer," *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 33.

³⁴³ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 27, 37.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 47.

the conviction that the Eucharist is the “entry of the Church into the Kingdom of God.”³⁴⁶

The ceremonial act of entrance suggests the dynamic movement of the liturgy.³⁴⁷ The symbolism of the altar as Christ and His Kingdom indicates the ascent of the Church to the throne of heaven.³⁴⁸ In Schmemmann’s view,

The entrance, the drawing near to the altar, is always an ascent. In it the Church ascends to the place where her genuine ‘life is hid with Christ in God.’ She ascends to heaven, where the Eucharist is celebrated.³⁴⁹

In the person of the priest, the assembly enters the sanctuary and continues its movement towards the Kingdom into the Divine presence.³⁵⁰

Schmemmann asserts the inseparable link between the Scriptures and the sacraments, noting that apart from the Word, the sacraments are alienated from Christ.³⁵¹ In truth, adds Schmemmann, the sacraments interpret the Word given to the Church in space and time.³⁵² Receiving God’s Word is participation in Christ.³⁵³ Before the Gospel is proclaimed, the Church calls upon the Father to send the Holy Spirit so that those who attend to God’s Word are transformed in its hearing. The intrinsic link between Word and sacrament testifies that the true meaning of the Scriptures is found in the Church alone.³⁵⁴ In the Eastern tradition, this prayer is equally esteemed with the *epiclesis* of the Eucharistic prayer.

Illumine our hearts, O Master who lovest [humankind] with the pure light of Thy

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 50, 52-53.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 60.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 46.

³⁵¹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 68.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

Divine knowledge. Open the eyes of our mind to the understanding of Thy gospel teachings...For Thou art the illumination of our souls and bodies, O Christ our God, and unto Thee we ascribe glory, together with Thy Father, who is from everlasting, and Thine all-holy, good, and life-creating Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen.³⁵⁵

In his explication of the Word as sacrament, Schmemmann highlights the role of the Holy Spirit. It is He who rests on the Church assembled, gifting them with the grace to accept, to understand and to proclaim the truth revealed in the Word. He writes:

Only the entire Church, manifested and actualized in the ‘assembly as the Church,’ has the mind of Christ. Only in the church gatherings are all gifts, all ministries revealed in their unity and indivisibility, as manifestations of the one Spirit, who fills the whole body.³⁵⁶

The Sacrament of the Word concludes the first part of the liturgy as the assembly prepares to move into the Liturgy of the Faithful.

The assembled faithful, the priesthood of the Body of Christ, offer prayers of intercession for the salvation of the whole world. The global mission of the Church is incorporated into the offering of Christ’s priestly sacrifice for the whole world.³⁵⁷ The Church offers herself to Christ in service of the mission of the Church.³⁵⁸ United to the sacrifice of Christ, the assembly offers to God, the gift of their lives in the offering of the bread and wine. Schmemmann notes that in this offering of self, humanity enters into Christ’s loving sacrifice of Himself to God and declares their unity of love and faith. During the Eucharistic canon, the transformation of the bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ is accomplished.³⁵⁹ The priest prays, “Let us stand aright!”³⁶⁰ The bodily

³⁵⁵ “Prayer Before the Gospel,” *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 50.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

³⁵⁷ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 93.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 159.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

movement upwards reflects the whole movement of salvation as a “return and ascent of... creation to the Creator.”³⁶¹ According to Schmemmann, this act demonstrates the passage of the faithful from this world into the glory of the presence of God in the new age of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in the Eucharist, humanity comes before God and realizes the purpose for which He created them.³⁶² In the gift of the Eucharist, the love offering of humanity is returned as the fullness of God’s love for humankind.³⁶³ “Thine own of Thine own we offer unto Thee,”³⁶⁴ epitomizes the upward movement of the assembly as God moves towards humanity in the gift of His Holy Spirit sent upon the assembly and upon the gifts in the *epiclesis*. The Spirit’s fulfilling action transforms humanity’s gifts into the Eucharist, the gift of God given to humankind.³⁶⁵ Schmemmann explains that the transformation of the Eucharistic gifts transcends any notion of time or natural laws.³⁶⁶ He notes that the transformation takes place in the new age of the Spirit in the Kingdom of God.³⁶⁷

The transformation happens...because...the Church [is] in Christ, i.e., in His Sacrifice, Love, Ascension, in the whole of His movement of deification, of transforming His humanity by His divinity; because...we are in His Eucharist and offer Him as our Eucharist to God...The mystery of the Eucharistic transformation is thus the mystery of the Church herself, of her belonging to the new age and to the new life—in the Holy Spirit.³⁶⁸

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 53.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

³⁶⁴ “Elevation of the Holy Gifts,” *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 74.

³⁶⁵ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 59.

³⁶⁶ Schmemmann is referring to the Western teaching of transubstantiation which explains substance, accidents, or “moments” in terms of time in *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 60.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

Teachings that limit the transformation of the Eucharistic gifts to formulas or moments in time, are contrary to Schmemann's theory of ascent and the holistic nature of the Eucharistic ordo. They also take away from the notion of deification as a process.

In communion with all humanity and the whole creation, the assembly prepares to receive the gift of Eucharist. To accept the Eucharist is to receive the Spirit of Christ who embraces everyone in unity and love.³⁶⁹ Standing before the Lamb of God who removes all sins, the faithful express individually and as a community, their unworthiness to approach the sacrament. In the Our Father, the great prayer of the Church, the faithful pray to be made worthy to share in the Eucharist.³⁷⁰ Passage and ascent reach their fulfillment as the assembled community is fed the divine food of the Kingdom.³⁷¹

Having passed from this world to the age of the Kingdom in the Eucharist, the faithful must now return to give witness to the fullness they have received. Schmemann explains:

And now it is time to return, to go back. For the time of this world has not yet come to its end. The hour of our own passage to the Father of all life has not yet arrived. And Christ sends us back, as witnesses of what we have seen, to proclaim His Kingdom and continue His work.³⁷² We are again in the beginning, where our ascent to the table of Christ, in His Kingdom began.³⁷³

The ecclesiological fullness of the Eucharist is made manifest in the Church's mission to sanctify and transform all creation by the faithful witness of Christian living. Those who have been sanctified, transformed and deified at the Eucharistic banquet of the Kingdom, witness to the presence of the Kingdom in this world.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

³⁷² Schmemann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 71.

³⁷³ Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 245.

The Divine Liturgy points beyond the world and its earthly cares to the true content of Christian life and the ultimate referential, the Kingdom of God. From beginning to end, the liturgy reveals that all things refer to Christ and find their meaning and fulfillment in Him. Its movement manifests the saving work of Christ already accomplished and granted.³⁷⁴ Those who participate in its mysteries are drawn into communion in the Holy Spirit and made sharers in divine life and the Kingdom to come.³⁷⁵

The Eucharist is the act that constitutes the Church. It is, according to Schmemmann:

the moment of truth, indeed, for there we stand before God, in Christ who is the End, the Eschaton, the fullness of all our humanity, and in Him offer to God the only ‘reasonable service’ (logike latreia) of the redeemed world—the Eucharist, and in the light of it see and understand and recapitulate in Christ the truth about, [humankind] and the world, about the creation and the fall, sin and redemption, about the whole universe and its final transfiguration in the Kingdom of God, and we receive this truth in participation of the Body and Blood of Christ, in the unending Pentecost that ‘guides us into all truth and shows us things to come.’ (Jn 16:13)³⁷⁶

In the Eucharist, Christ gathers His People in his act of Ascension to the Kingdom.³⁷⁷

They pass from the old ways of this world and are transformed into the newness of sanctification and deification. In the Eucharist, the Church receives her identity as the

“Sacrament of the *coming* and presence of the Kingdom which is *to come*.”³⁷⁸

Rediscovery of the Eucharist in its ecclesiological fullness demands a return to a holistic approach to the liturgy. Rediscovery of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Church

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 225.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 189.

³⁷⁶ Schmemmann, *Theology and Eucharist*, 23.

³⁷⁷ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 71.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

reveals the Church's mission to witness in this world to the sanctifying, redeeming and transforming work of Christ. All creation is deified in the Eucharist as the ultimate expression of God's love for the world.

Eucharist: Sacrament of the Kingdom

Jesus inaugurates his public ministry announcing the Kingdom of God. "This is the time of fulfillment, the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent and believe in the gospel." (Mk 1:15)³⁷⁹ The Kingdom of God is the Truth that has shaped the entire theological legacy of Alexander Schmemmann. All life and all meaning begin, end and finds their ultimate destiny in this eschatological reality. According to Schmemmann, the Kingdom is defined by more than life after death. In his view, the Kingdom is:

fullness of life, fullness of joy, fullness of knowledge. It is the triumph of divine life. It is everything for which God created [humankind] and the world, and from which [humankind] fell away through sin and self-centered pride. And it is this Kingdom which Christ reveals and gives to us anew, giving it to us again as the ultimate goal and very content of knowledge and the world.³⁸⁰

Plekon submits that Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision manifests his own desire for the Kingdom. As the revelation of the presence of the Kingdom of God,³⁸¹ the Eucharist is the Church's participation in the heavenly, messianic banquet and a foretaste of her fulfillment in the Kingdom.³⁸²

The eschatological fullness of the Eucharist informs the Church of her mission to actualize the Kingdom in this world and to sanctify, redeem, and deify the world.

Schmemmann observes that the world must first be affirmed and accepted as loved by God.

³⁷⁹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Celebration of Faith: I Believe...Sermons, Vol.I* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1991), 105.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁸¹ Plekon, *The Church, The Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann's Theological Legacy*, 133,139.

³⁸² Schmemmann, *Theology and Eucharist*, 20.

The world is the expression of God's love for humanity.³⁸³ Schmemmann cautions against any conclusions that the world will be transformed into the Kingdom. He claims that a chasm exists between this world and the Kingdom that can never be filled in this age. Those who receive Christ in the Eucharist are redeemed by a new life that embraces the world. Thus, by humanity's participation in the Eucharist, the world is redeemed.³⁸⁴ He adds:

The Kingdom is yet to come, and the Church is not of this world. And yet this Kingdom to come is already present, and the Church is fulfilled in this world.³⁸⁵

The Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Kingdom, is the true experience of the eschatological reality that holds all of life and creation together. The celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy is the ascent of the Church to the table of the Lord in the Kingdom, and her return to this world as witnesses and missionaries.³⁸⁶

Schmemmann notes the eschatological nature of life. In his view, all of life is imbued with an eschatological character that enables Christian believers to experience the Kingdom in their midst. He argues that the eschatological character of life enables the Christian to live in the world with the awareness that the Kingdom of God is already present, although not fully.³⁸⁷ Plekon notes that Schmemmann's life and teaching are a testimony to what it means to live in this world while living for the Kingdom. He writes, "Already, decades ago, he was enough of a good citizen of the Kingdom *and of the world*

³⁸³ Schmemmann, *The Missionary Imperative*, 213-214.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁶ Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Eschatology," *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed., Fisch, 96-97.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 94.

to truly love both, and to tirelessly speak the truth of the one to the other.”³⁸⁸

Schmemmann’s vision of life and of the world was formed in the experience of the Church and her entrance into the glory of the Kingdom in the Eucharist. In the Lord’s Day, the faithful encounter that which is to come.³⁸⁹ The Lord’s Day marks the beginning of the new life of the “day without evening”³⁹⁰ when the faithful will participate in the unending Messianic banquet of heaven.

Schmemmann’s Theological Vision

Schmemmann articulated his entire theological agenda and his worldview in a conversation with Fr. Thomas Hopko. On a warm and sunny day in August, 1968, as Schmemmann was vacationing with his family at his beloved Labelle resort in Canada, he turned to Fr. Hopko and spoke these words:

When I die, you can write in my memoriam in one brief paragraph. You just have to say that my whole worldview, my whole life, could be summed up in one sentence: two ‘no’s, one ‘yes,’ and eschatology—two ‘no’s,’ one ‘yes,’ and the Kingdom to come.³⁹¹

Schmemmann’s entire life was oriented toward the Kingdom of God. As he neared his death, it was the realization of the nearness of the Kingdom that filled him with joyful anticipation. On a cold, wintry day in December, 1983, Fr. Hopko complied with his father-in-law’s request. In a sermon preached in Schmemmann’s memory, Fr. Hopko outlined Schmemmann’s “‘yes’ to life in Christ, and ‘no’ to death in all its forms.”³⁹²

³⁸⁸ Plekon, “The Church, The Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann’s Theological Legacy,” 140, 143.

³⁸⁹ Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Eschatology,” *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed., Fisch, 97.

³⁹⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 51-52.

³⁹¹ Father Thomas Hopko, “Two ‘No’s’ and One ‘Yes’: A Sermon in Memory of Father Alexander Schmemmann,” *Sourozh* 17 (August): 3.

³⁹² *Ibid.*, 1.

Schmemmann summarized his vision in a threefold statement: the world is created; the world is fallen; and the world is redeemed.³⁹³

Schmemmann saw the world as the divine gift of God, the sacrament of His loving presence and the manifestation of His glory. His vision of the world resonates with the doxological character of Staniloae's creation theology. Hopko testifies to his father-in-law's conviction about the goodness of the created world:

God in Christ the Word, through His Spirit, through the person of Fr. Alexander—in His life and in his death—has taught us, first of all, that this world is created by God and that it is good. How beautiful is this world! How glorious it is! It is the epiphany and the sacrament of God Himself. It radiates divine beauty. It radiates with the Uncreated Light of the Godhead. It shines with the presence and the power of God Almighty Himself. Those who have eyes can see it, those who have ears can hear it singing, and we know that all is filled with the goodness, the power, the presence of God.³⁹⁴

The goodness of creation is the fundamental truth underlying Schmemmann's teaching on the sacramentality of the world.

The second fundamental truth about the world, in Schmemmann's view, cannot be separated from the first. Schmemmann posits that the world is fallen. Created in the image of God, the human person is endowed with the freedom to choose between good or evil. The consequent refusal of the first ancestors to receive the world as a means of communion with God imposed an infinite distance between the created world, in need of restoration, and the Creator. A few months before his death, Schmemmann, weakened though he was from the progression of his cancer, exhorted the students of St. Vladimir's Theological Seminary to remain faithful to the Eucharist so as to guard themselves from the force of evil:

³⁹³ Schmemmann, "Liturgy and Eschatology," 98.

³⁹⁴ Father Thomas Hopko, "Two 'Nos' and One 'Yes,'" *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28 (1984): 45.

I came over to tell you just one important thing. You will learn many things here about God, and the seminary, and life and prayer...But I came over tonight to tell you just one important thing. "Remember always that the Devil exists."³⁹⁵

Hopko also acknowledges the destructive force of the prince of this world. He posits that because the world, like Adam, refuses to raise their hearts in thanksgiving to God, it remains a fallen world.³⁹⁶

Schmemmann's third fundamental acclamation of faith reveals the essential truth of Christianity: the world is redeemed. God sends His Son and Holy Spirit to accomplish the redemption of the world. Hopko testifies to the hope and anticipation that is realized in Christ, whose death and resurrection redeem all of creation. "All that God has made will be saved, resurrected, restored, renewed in Christ who has risen from the dead, for death itself, in that restoration, becomes the instrument of victory."³⁹⁷ Schmemmann posits that the cross of Christ brings the joy of redemption into a fallen world.³⁹⁸

Imbedded within Schmemmann's vision of the world as created, fallen and redeemed is his theological legacy of "two 'no,s' one 'yes,' and eschatology."³⁹⁹ The first 'no' is 'no' to any secularist view of the world that denies the world's transparency to God and humanity's Eucharistic vocation. When humanity views the world as an end in itself, they fail to see its sacramental value and its meaning as communion with God, the Source of all life.⁴⁰⁰ Schmemmann's often quoted, "*tout est ailleurs*,"⁴⁰¹ according to Hopko, was a testimony that his father-in-law was rooted in this truth: "All is elsewhere

³⁹⁵ Hopko, "Two 'Nos' and One 'Yes,'" *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly*, 46.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁹ Father Thomas Hopko, "Two 'No's' and One 'Yes': A Sermon in Memory of Father Alexander Schmemmann," *Sourozh* 17 (August): 3.

⁴⁰⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 16-17.

⁴⁰¹ A French poem written by Julien Green that translates, "all is elsewhere."

and this world has its meaning from elsewhere. Any attempt to dare to explain this world except as from God must be rejected. The world has no meaning in itself. None at all.”⁴⁰² The world must be received as a manifestation and a revelation of God. The meaning of the world lies in its instrumentality as a dialogue and a communion with God.

The second ‘no’ defines ‘no’ to religion. Schmemmann argues that Christ does not bring a new religion, He brings new life:

And in Him was the end of ‘religion,’ because He Himself was the Answer to all religion, to all human hunger for God, because in Him the life that was lost by [humanity]—and which could only be symbolized, signified, asked for in religion—was restored to [humankind].⁴⁰³

Christ, Himself, is the true temple who brings the Kingdom of God and redemption of the whole universe. As long as Christians regard Christianity as a useful commodity or the justification for death, it is a secularist religion, claims Schmemmann. Christ is the fullness of Truth in life and in death.⁴⁰⁴ For Schmemmann, to be a Christian is to know by faith that Christ is Eternal Life. Therefore, life in the Risen Christ is the entrance to eternal life-giving divine communion; the “expectation of the ‘day without evening’ of the Kingdom.”⁴⁰⁵ Schmemmann reflects on the new life that is revealed in Christ through death:

And if I make this new life mine, mine this hunger and thirst for the Kingdom, mine this expectation of Christ, mine the certitude that Christ is Life, then my very death will be an act of communion with Life. For neither life nor death can separate us from the love of Christ. I do not know when and how the fulfillment will come. I do not know when all things will be consummated in Christ...But I know that in Christ this great Passage, the Pascha of the world has begun, that the light of the ‘world to come’ comes to us in the joy and peace of

⁴⁰² Hopko, “Two ‘No’s’ and One ‘Yes,’” *ibid.*

⁴⁰³ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 20.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 99.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 106.

the Holy Spirit, for Christ is risen and Life reigneth.⁴⁰⁶

Life in Christ was the joy and the truth that consumed Schmemmann in his life and his dying. According to Schmemmann, Christ is the Beginning, the End and the Meaning of all existence. Schmemmann's 'no' to religion was his 'yes' to Christ.

Schmemmann's 'yes' to the Kingdom resounds in his vision of the Eucharist in its eschatological fullness. In the Eucharist, all creation is restored by Christ.⁴⁰⁷ Those who share at the Lord's table share in Christ's Ascension to the Kingdom. Theirs is the hope and the promise of future glory that awaits those who have tasted the bread of immortality. Schmemmann writes:

the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command with the archangel's call, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air; and so we shall always be with the Lord. (1 Thess 4: 16-17)⁴⁰⁸

The Eucharistic 'Amen' is the Christian 'Yes' to the Kingdom of God revealed, manifested and communicated in each Eucharistic liturgy.

The Messianic Banquet

The image of food is central to Schmemmann's theological understanding of the world as good, fallen and redeemed. Food is the thread that holds together the cosmic, ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions of the economy of God. The creation account in Genesis attests to the goodness of the world: "See, I give you every seed-bearing plant all over the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food..." (Gen 1:29) According to Schmemmann, God's gift of the world to humankind is

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁷ Hopko, "Two 'No's' and One 'Yes,' 47.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

given using images of food.⁴⁰⁹ In his description of the world as fallen, Schmemmann observes that food is the object of the transgression of the first ancestors: “You have eaten...from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat.” (Gen 2:11) Food is also critical to Schmemmann’s interpretation of the world as redeemed:

While they were eating, [Jesus] took bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take it; this is my body. Then He took a cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, and they all drank from it. This is my blood of the covenant, which will be shed for many. Amen, I say to you, I shall not drink again the fruit of the vine until the day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God. (Mk 14: 22-25)

According to Schmemmann, the banquet of the Kingdom of heaven is the true life-giving food.⁴¹⁰ The Church prays for this food of eternal life in the Divine Liturgy: “Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me today as a communicant.”⁴¹¹ Throughout salvation history, it is the image of food that speaks to humanity in terms of life.

In Schmemmann’s view, the human person is a “hungry being.”⁴¹² Although the natural desire for food as sustenance is one that is shared by all, he submits that humanity’s hunger goes beyond human physical needs. He writes, “Behind all the hunger of our life is God. All desire is finally a desire for Him.”⁴¹³ Divine love for humanity was poured into creation. God’s gift of the world as food for humanity was ultimately intended as the means of union with Him and a manifestation of His presence. In the Eucharist, human sustenance of bread and wine are offered to God in thanksgiving for the fruits of the earth. It is an offering of love and thanksgiving. Schmemmann

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹¹ “Communion Prayer,” *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 88.

⁴¹² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14.

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*

describes the continuity between the sacramental nature of the world and Christ as the

Bread of Life:

We offered the bread in remembrance of Christ because we know that Christ is Life, and all food, therefore, must lead us to Him. And now when we receive this bread from His hands, we know that He has taken up all life, filled it with Himself, made it what it was meant to be: communion with God, Sacrament of His presence and love. Only in the Kingdom can we confess with St. Basil that 'this bread is in very truth the precious body of our Lord, this wine the precious blood of Christ.'⁴¹⁴

According to Schmemmann, when Christ fills creation with Himself, He restores it to the gift of God's communion with humankind.

Elsewhere, Schmemmann points to the priestly responsibility of humanity to transform the gift of the world into communion with God:

As priest, [humankind] stands in the center of the world and unifies it in his act of blessing God, of both receiving the world from God and offering it to God—and by filling the world with this Eucharist, [he/she] transforms [his/her] life, the one [he/she] receives from the world, into life in God, into communion with Him. The world was created as the 'matter,' the material of one all-embracing Eucharist, and [humankind] was created as the priest of this cosmic sacrament.⁴¹⁵

Schmemmann posits that humankind is given the priestly vocation to fill all life with God and to transform the world into life lived in communion with God. Bread and wine of the earth made Eucharist communicate God's Kingdom⁴¹⁶ as Christ, the new Life, draws all those who have tasted of Him into the life of the Triune God.⁴¹⁷

As Schmemmann notes, it is the Holy Spirit who assumes the earthly bread and wine and lifts them into the new aeon where the Church eats and drinks of the eternal

⁴¹⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 43.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴¹⁶ Alexander Schmemmann, "Worship in a Secular Age," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16, no.1 (1972); 7.

⁴¹⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 43.

food at the banquet table in the Kingdom.⁴¹⁸ Schmemmann recalls the communion prayer, “Receive the Body of Christ; taste the Fountain of immortality. Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!”⁴¹⁹ The prayer of *epiclesis* reveals⁴²⁰ the power of the Holy Spirit, who transforms and manifests the Eucharistic gifts as the Body and Blood of Christ. In addition, this prayer foreshadows the manifestation of the Holy Spirit in the inauguration of the Kingdom in the world to come⁴²¹ when the Church is perfected. Until then, She must remain vigilant to her vocation revealed to her in the Divine Liturgy: As Schmemmann consistently reiterates:

It is precisely in and through her leitourgia that...the Church is informed of her... eschatological vocation, receives the power to fulfill it and thus truly becomes ‘what She is’—the Sacrament, in Christ, of the new creation; the sacrament in Christ, of the Kingdom.⁴²²

The Eucharist is the actualization of the Church as the new creation in Christ. In the Eucharist, the Church has entrance into the Kingdom and participation in the heavenly banquet. The Eucharist reveals that the fallen world has been restored as a new creation. Schmemmann notes that the transformation of the bread and wine manifests the essence of the Divine Liturgy as actualizing the Church into a new creation:⁴²³

The Church [is] redeemed by Christ, reconciled and given access to heaven, filled with Divine Glory, sanctified by the Holy Spirit, and therefore capable of and called to participate in divine life, in communion of the Body and Blood of Christ...⁴²⁴ The Eucharist is the participation in His deified humanity, the communion of divine and ‘inexhaustible’ Life.⁴²⁵

⁴¹⁸ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” 20.

⁴¹⁹ “Communion Prayer,” *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 92.

⁴²⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 44.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*

⁴²² Schmemmann, “Liturgy and Theology,” 92.

⁴²³ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 117.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 119.

In the Eucharist, the Church receives the new life of the Risen Christ that makes her the living witness of the new age of the Kingdom of God.⁴²⁶ God gives Himself in love as the food of eternal life, the only food that satisfies humanity's hunger. The Eucharist is the food from heaven that sustains the created world, heals and restores the fallen world, and deifies the redeemed world.

Schmemmann and Eschatology

Schmemmann's life and work were rooted in the belief that the Kingdom of God is the ultimate and saving Truth, the message of Christ and the content of faith. He posits that the Kingdom is the Gospel and the "eternal horizon."⁴²⁷ In his view, eschatology is quintessential to Christian faith and theology.⁴²⁸ In fact, eschatology is what makes theology possible. Seen merely as a futuristic or individualistic fate of the soul, eschatology is robbed of its intrinsic meaning to Christian faith and theology. Schmemmann posits that eschatology embraces "the life, death, resurrection, and glorification of Jesus Christ, the descent of the Holy Spirit and the institution of the Church."⁴²⁹ More than the final moments of salvation history, these events inaugurate the new life of the Kingdom of God. Schmemmann believes that eschatology reveals the true nature of the Church: the manifestation of the ultimate truth and the presence of the Kingdom of God.

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, "The Problem of the Church's Presence in the World in Orthodoxy," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 21, no.1 (1977): 9.

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*

Eschatology gives meaning to the Church's presence in the world and her relationship to it.⁴³⁰ Schmemmann submits that the Church is called to minister to a world that is created in goodness; a world that is fallen; and a world that is redeemed. The nature and vocation of the Church as revealed to her through eschatology suggests to Christian faith that the world in its creation glorifies God. As the reflection of divine wisdom and goodness, it is fitting indeed that the Church prays, "Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!"⁴³¹ Secondly, in the Church's experience of the Kingdom, She is made aware that sin alienates her from God. Therefore, She must work to free the world from its enslavement to sin. The eschatological experience of the Church proves that the world is redeemed. Christ, the new Adam, restores and redeems the fallen world, recreating it anew as the means of humanity's communion with God and participation in divine eternal life in the Kingdom of heaven.⁴³² Eschatology defines the interrelationship of the Church and the world in terms of the Kingdom of God.

The Church's experience of the Kingdom of God *par excellence* is the Eucharist. Schmemmann notes the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist:

Knowledge of God, communion with Him, the possibility while still living in 'this world' to foretaste, and really partake of the 'joy, peace and righteousness' of the 'world to come.'⁴³³

In the Eucharist, the faithful encounter the Risen Christ and are united with Him "at his table in the Kingdom."⁴³⁴ Schmemmann was absorbed by this transcendental truth with each celebration of the Divine Liturgy. As Scorer notes:

⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁴³² *Ibid.*

⁴³³ Schmemmann, "The Problem of the Church's Presence in the World in Orthodoxy," 9.

⁴³⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 43.

At the end of the anaphoral prayer, [Schmemmann] would prostrate himself before the Holy Table with the words ‘*Maran—atha*’ (‘come Lord!’) as a confirmation of the truly eschatological dimension of what had come to pass.⁴³⁵

This was the Truth that Schmemmann knew and loved: the eternal, transcendent life in Christ in His eternal Kingdom.⁴³⁶

Eucharist: Sacrament of Deification

Reflecting on the Feast of the Transfiguration, Schmemmann writes that the deepest longing and ultimate happiness of the human heart rests in the glory and presence of God. “For nothing in this world can satisfy us save God, His glory, His light, His truth, His Kingdom.”⁴³⁷ God gives Himself to humanity in Christ so that all who follow Him in the ascent to Mt. Tabor can taste and see “what no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of [humankind] conceived, what God has prepared for those who love Him.” (1Cor 2:9)⁴³⁸ Christ’s transfiguration is the revelation of the ultimate destiny of humanity transformed and transfigured in Christ through grace. The transfigured, incarnate Son of God reveals humanity’s ultimate destiny: “becoming divine by grace.”⁴³⁹ The purpose and meaning of all the created order, notes Schmemmann, is that all creation is filled with Christ.⁴⁴⁰

Schmemmann posits that Christian life is analogous to climbing Mt. Tabor with Christ. It is a journey made possible in and through the Church, whose mission is to

⁴³⁵ Peter Scorer, “Obituaries: Alexander Schmemmann, 1921-1983” *Sobornost* 6, no.2 (1984): 67-68.

⁴³⁶ Schmemmann, *Celebration of Faith: I Believe...Sermons*, Vol. I, 104.

⁴³⁷ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 82.

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, 82-83.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

reflect Taboric light on the world.⁴⁴¹ Through the Church, human life is sanctified and transformed by the saving acts of Christ and the Holy Spirit communicated in the sacramental life of the Church. In the Eucharist, Christian life realizes its fulfillment.⁴⁴² According to Schmemmann the Eucharist is “the all-embracing sacrament of salvation, a sacrament of unity, love, sanctification, sacrifice, deification.”⁴⁴³ The Eucharist sustains the faithful on their journey to Mt. Tabor where they are embraced by the transforming and deifying light of Christ. The journey to Mt. Tabor is the path to *theosis*. Transfigured and transformed by the light of Christ, the Christian attains deification. In Schmemmann’s view, the Eucharist is the food for the journey that leads to the light of Christ.

The Human Person: Created for Eucharist

The doctrine of *theosis* informs Schmemmann’s theological development of the Divine Liturgy as passage and ascent. In his treatise on the “sacrament of all sacraments,”⁴⁴⁴ Schmemmann traces the passage of the Church from this world to the Kingdom. The solemn blessing of the Kingdom, he notes, launches the “eternal passage”⁴⁴⁵ of the faithful with Christ to the Father.⁴⁴⁶ The movement reaches its fulfillment during the Eucharistic canon as the faithful stand in a gesture of ascent from this world to the age of the Kingdom. It is, according to Schmemmann, the true moment of

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 90-91.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 40.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 42.

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

humanity's destiny as they stand in the presence of divine glory to give thanks to God⁴⁴⁷ and to discover the purpose of their creation.⁴⁴⁸ Schmemmann notes:

When a [person] stands before God, face to face, when [he/she] has been accepted into this Presence, when [his/her] sins are forgiven and [he/she] has recovered [his/her] pristine beauty, the Eucharist—thanksgiving, adoration, worship—is truly the ultimate and the total expression of [his/her] whole being. [The human person] was created for Eucharist—for the pure love of God, for the sake of God, for the recognition of God as the content of [his/her] very life, as the Goal of all [his/her] goals, the Answer to all [his/her] questions, the Purpose of all [his/her] desires, the Object of all [his/her] Knowledge, the Fulfillment of all [his/her] power and [his/her] thirst for love. Eucharist is the Divine Element, the Image of God in us.⁴⁴⁹

To praise, bless and worship God is the meaning of goodness that must resound in the liturgy, as it did at creation, “And God saw that it was good.” (Gen 1:10)⁴⁵⁰ Schmemmann claims, “...something is good or right when it conforms to its nature, purpose, conception; when its form or fulfillment corresponds to its ‘content’ or plan.”⁴⁵¹ The human person was created for union with God. Standing before Him as *homo adorans*, [he/she] realizes that love and adoration is the true purpose for which God created humanity⁴⁵² The Eucharist is the content of the new life given in Christ and the Holy Spirit, that establishes the meaning of authentic relationship with God.⁴⁵³ According to Schmemmann, it is:

the very goodness of the good, the revelation about the world, about life, about us ourselves, that this divine good bears and manifests in itself—the fullness of joy, the rapture, through which it radiates and gives life.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁴⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 163-164.

⁴⁴⁹ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 53.

⁴⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 164.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

⁴⁵² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 34.

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁵⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 165.

Schmemmann associates this goodness with the experience of the Apostles on Mt. Tabor when the transfigured Christ revealed to humanity the goodness of their vocation to deification.⁴⁵⁵ The liturgy of thanksgiving is the same revelation of the splendor of the divinity of Christ, and the foreshadowing of the glorious transformation of humankind and all creation in Christ.⁴⁵⁶ For it is here, claims Schmemmann, that the human person, united with all creation, returns to the place for which [he/she] was created: the glorious presence of God⁴⁵⁷ to offer Christ as Eucharist, in an act of thanksgiving that consummates [him/her] as priest of creation, as *homo adorans* deified in the Eucharist.

Schmemmann notes that the prayer of thanksgiving brings wholeness to the Divine Liturgy as it acknowledges the accomplishment of the Eucharist and the fitting response of the Church.⁴⁵⁸ Thanksgiving recalls humanity's primordial state of joy and happiness in Paradise resulting from the gifts of fullness of knowledge and freedom.⁴⁵⁹ Paradise is humanity's term of reference for God as the source of all life. Paradise also reveals the meaning of humanity as fallen and enslaved by sin and death. Because Paradise is the ultimate and eternal destiny of all creation, God grants salvation through Christ in the Holy Spirit.⁴⁶⁰ The Divine Liturgy is truly thanksgiving for the gift of Paradise returned to humanity in the Eucharist, "the content of eternal life, of eternal joy, of eternal bliss, for which we were created."⁴⁶¹ The Eucharist reveals the meaning and destiny of all

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵⁶ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 39.

⁴⁵⁷ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 170.

⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 173.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 174-175.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 175.

creation, “Holy! Holy! Holy! Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory!”⁴⁶² In

Schmemmann’s view, the Eucharist is the Church’s experience of Paradise in an eternal doxology of adoration and thanksgiving.

Fullness of Knowledge

Jesus links eternal life with the knowledge of God. “Now this is eternal life, that they should know You, the only true God, and the One whom you sent, Jesus Christ.” (Jn 17:3)⁴⁶³ In the primordial state, the first ancestors knew God in their relationship of communion with Him. Their encounter and union with the living God, the source of all life, transformed the whole of their lives into thanksgiving, into Eucharist. They enjoyed a continual relationship of intimacy with God from whom they received their very being.⁴⁶⁴ The first ancestors apprehended the world as the means by which God revealed Himself as divine love and the world as their means of communion with Him.⁴⁶⁵ The intimacy of their relationship with God was assurance of immortality.

However, Adam and Eve exchanged their thirst for God and the reception of the world as the means of communion with Him for their desire to experience the “the tree of knowledge of good and evil.” (Gen 2:17) Having forfeited Eucharistic life, they no longer were privileged to the fullness of the knowledge of God and subsequent knowledge of the world. As Schmemmann suggests, their knowledge of God and the world was reduced to a knowledge about God and the world which denied them “access...to the

⁴⁶² Sanctus, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 72.

⁴⁶³ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 175.

⁴⁶⁴ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 55.

⁴⁶⁵ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 175-177.

very essence of the world and life...⁴⁶⁶ Thus, having turned away from God, Adam and Eve introduced sin and death to the world.

Christ's victory over sin and death unlocks the gates of Paradise, permitting only one response of the Church, a thanksgiving "for all things of which we know and of which we know not, whether manifest or unseen..."⁴⁶⁷ Truly, the Church joins its voice with all heavenly creatures to proclaim the wonderful deeds God has done for his people:⁴⁶⁸

And when we had fallen away Thou didst raise us up again, and did not cease to do all things until Thou hadst brought us up to heaven, and hadst endowed us with Thy Kingdom which is to come...⁴⁶⁹

The true knowledge to which God called Adam and Eve in Paradise was restored in Christ whose knowledge of God is granted as the gift of thanksgiving to humanity.⁴⁷⁰ Each pronouncement of the words of the anaphoral prayer, "when He...took bread in His holy, pure, and blameless hands; and when He had given thanks and blessed it, and hallowed it..."⁴⁷¹ is a testimony of the recreation of the world as the paradise in which God's creation is given as a participation in divine life. The Eucharist restores humanity's access to knowledge of God making thanksgiving the fullness of knowledge of God.⁴⁷²

Humanity's restoration in Christ extends beyond the forgiveness of sins and victory over death, to deification. Through the Incarnation of Christ, human nature is

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁴⁶⁷ Anaphora, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 72.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 72.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁴⁷⁰ Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 176-177.

⁴⁷¹ Anaphora, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 73.

⁴⁷² Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 177-178.

united to His divinity, thus transforming and glorifying the nature assumed by Him. Just as Christ ascended to heaven, it is possible for humanity to experience the new life of the Kingdom that comes as a result of communion with Christ. The fullness of thanksgiving, notes Schmemmann, is given in each liturgy as the ascension into the Kingdom and participation in the life of the Triune God.⁴⁷³ Christ is the content of the thanksgiving; Christ is Eucharist.⁴⁷⁴

Before we stand before God, remembering all that He has done for us, and offer to Him our thanksgiving for all His benefits, we inescapably discover that the content of all this thanksgiving and remembrance is Christ. All remembrance is ultimately the remembrance of Christ, all thanksgiving is finally thanksgiving for Christ...In the light of the Eucharist we see that Christ is indeed the life and light of all that exists, and the glory that fills heaven and earth. There is nothing else to remember, nothing else to be thankful for, because in Him everything finds its being, its life, its end.⁴⁷⁵

Schmemmann posits the deifying character of the Eucharistic thanksgiving that raises the Church in Christ as participants of the Kingdom.⁴⁷⁶ The salvation of the world is completed in each thanksgiving and humanity's vocation to *theosis* is restored:⁴⁷⁷ According to Schmemmann, this is accomplished when humanity realizes their rightful duty to worship God. True worship leads to the knowledge of God and genuine thanksgiving that compels humankind to transform the world into a life of communion with God.⁴⁷⁸ True knowledge of God is realized in the personal encounter with Christ in

⁴⁷³ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 56.

⁴⁷⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 40.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 181.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

the Eucharist. As Schmemmann indicates, it is the true knowledge for which humankind was created and the knowledge that brings eternal life.⁴⁷⁹

Communion With the Father

Schmemmann calls Christianity “the *religion of fatherhood*.”⁴⁸⁰ When Christ invites believers to call God, “Our Father,” He confers the gift of filial love and intimacy and the relationship that ensures their salvation.⁴⁸¹ Within this address humanity discovers the true relationship that brings union with God. Schmemmann states:

Here faith opens into trust, and dependence yields to freedom, intimacy, and ultimately unfolds as joy...this is already communion with Him in love, in unity, and trust. This is already the beginning of knowing eternity...⁴⁸²

Knowledge of God as ‘Father’ acknowledges, first of all, that God created humanity *ex nihilo* and that He is not father in the natural sense known to humankind. Rather, the Father is made known by faith in the only-begotten Son of God, who, alone, knows Him and chooses those to whom this knowledge is to be revealed. (Mt 11:27)⁴⁸³ As Schmemmann indicates, knowledge of God as “Father” presupposes that the God whom “no one has seen,” (Jn 1:19) is the “*holy, absolutely other*, incomprehensible, unknowable, unfathomable and ultimately even frightful” One.⁴⁸⁴ Ultimately, the salvation of the whole created order consists in a twofold revelation: the Father’s revelation of the Son and the Son’s revelation of the Father. As Schmemmann observes, God’s fatherhood is revealed to humanity in the Son:⁴⁸⁵ “No one knows the Son except

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁴⁸⁰ Schmemmann, *Our Father*, 21.

⁴⁸¹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 182.

⁴⁸² Schmemmann, *Our Father*, 20.

⁴⁸³ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 183.

⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 182.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son wishes to reveal Him.” (Matt 11:27)⁴⁸⁶ Clearly, thanksgiving is in order as the faithful realize the loving gift of this knowledge poured out on them in the Son. Christian faith consists in believing that the only-begotten Son grants humanity a share in His sonship with the Father. It is also the belief that the Father’s love for the Son is imparted to humankind in the Son. Knowledge, love and union with the Father are possible through the Son.⁴⁸⁷

The Son of God, who, in Himself unites both divine and human nature, makes it possible for humanity to ascend to divinity. In the Eucharist, humanity is rendered to God as Father. The Church prays to be made worthy of this filial relationship in the prayer, “And make us worthy, O Master, that with boldness and without condemnation we may dare to call on Thee...as Father...”⁴⁸⁸ She unites her desires with those expressed by Christ in the great prayer of the Church, “Hallowed be Thy Name, Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done.”⁴⁸⁹ The Eucharist brings the Church into communion with the Father in the Kingdom⁴⁹⁰ “the eternal home and ultimate vocation of [human] glory and destiny.”⁴⁹¹ Truly, the Eucharist is the sacrament of deification that lifts the Church in an ascent with Christ into the glory and presence of the Father.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸⁸ Prayer before the Our Father, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 82.

⁴⁸⁹ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 65-66.

⁴⁹⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 184.

⁴⁹¹ Schmemmann, *Our Father*, 22.

Fullness of Freedom

Adam and Eve enjoyed fullness of freedom in the Garden of Paradise. God, alone, satisfied all their hunger. Their lives were a constant hymn of praise and blessing to Him who had granted them the earth as the manifestation of his love and presence. The dynamic and intimate relationship they shared with God immersed them in the truth of the knowledge of God. Filled with thanksgiving and love for God alone, they relished in the fullness of the freedom of God's love.

Because of their sin, Adam and Eve fell from the heights of their true human freedom.⁴⁹² They abandoned the "honor of their high calling"⁴⁹³ to *theosis* by turning away from God and away from the dignity of being created in His image.⁴⁹⁴ The tragedy of the Fall, in Schmemmann's view, is that the first parents exchanged God's promise of deification for the words of the serpent, "you will be like gods."⁴⁹⁵ Schmemmann adds:

[Adam and Eve] heard the serpent's whisper 'you will be like gods' not from outside, but from within, in the blessed fullness of paradise, and wanted to have life in [themselves] and for [themselves]. [They] wanted all of God's gifts as [their] own and for [themselves]... But these words were in fact stolen from God. God created us and called us into 'his wonderful light' so that we would become 'like gods' and have abundant life.⁴⁹⁶

Humanity's vocation to *theosis* promised immortality, incorruptibility and eternal life in communion with God. Wanting life in themselves and not in God, Adam and Eve fell away from life. Their sin introduced death into a world that was formerly the means of communion with God, the Source of Life. When Adam and Eve lost sight of the

⁴⁹² Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 178.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁴⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

sacramentality of the world, they forfeited their means of communion with Life. Their knowledge of God turned to knowledge of pride, lust, and passion.⁴⁹⁷ True freedom was no longer knowable in a world tainted by sin and death.⁴⁹⁸

Schmemmann posits that true freedom is possible for humanity in the Eucharist, in the true act of thanksgiving. In giving thanks, the baptized faithful realize their relationship of dependency on God, which, according to Schmemmann, brings true freedom as children of God.⁴⁹⁹ The encounter with Christ in the Eucharist is a revelation of the truth; the same truth that Jesus promised his disciples. “If you remain in my word, you will truly be my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” (Jn 8:32)⁵⁰⁰ The Eucharist reveals the truth about God’s relationship to the world. In the Eucharist, the faithful enter into the true freedom of the sons and daughters of God in thanksgiving where knowledge of God establishes communion with Him.⁵⁰¹

Schmemmann notes:

God created [humankind] not for some kind of abstract ‘freedom’ but for himself, for communion with [humankind], having been ‘brought’ out of nonbeing into life and life in abundance, which is only from him, in him, is him. [The human person] seeks and thirsts only for this life.⁵⁰²

Thanksgiving, as knowledge of God, imparts a disposition of reverence for the world and the capacity to receive the world as the means of communion with God. In addition, thanksgiving is the realization of the vocation of the human person to participate in God’s life. As Schmemmann indicates, when Christ presents the faithful to the Father in the

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 180-181.

⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 180.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*

Eucharist, they realize the truth about the world and about their true nature as sons and daughters of God, called to share in His divine life.⁵⁰³ In the Eucharist, Christ restores all of creation, fills it with Himself and perfects it as the offering of communion to God. The world is once again the manifestation of the presence of God, a “knowledge that was impossible in the ‘darkness of this world.’”⁵⁰⁴ The light of Christ reveals the truth about humanity as fallen from God and self through sin. Schmemmann argues that the light of Christ exposes the truth that sin is rooted in ingratitude. It is human refusal to hymn, to bless, to praise, to give thanks, and to worship God.⁵⁰⁵ Sin is the abandonment of true human nature made in the image of the Creator to love.⁵⁰⁶ As Schmemmann observes, when love ceases to be thanksgiving, humanity is blind to the gift of the world as the love of God, and deaf to the call to *theosis*; to the vocation to transform the world and all life into communion with God.⁵⁰⁷

As Schmemmann notes, the Eucharist is the deifying principle that calls humanity out of the darkness of sin into the marvelous light of Christ (1Pet 2:9) and the promise of participation in divine nature. (1Pt 2:9)⁵⁰⁸

[The eucharist] is a manifestation of [the human person] to himself[herself], a manifestation of his[her] essence, his[her] place and calling in the light of the divine countenance, and therefore an act that renews and recreates [humankind]. In thanksgiving we recognize and confess above all the divine source and the divine calling of our life. The prayer of thanksgiving affirms that God brought us from nonexistence into being, which means that He created us as partakers of Being, i.e., not just something that comes from Him, but something permeated by his presence, light, wisdom, love—by what...Gregory Palamas calls the divine energies and which makes the world called to and capable of transfiguration into a

⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, 184.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 186.

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 189.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 184.

‘new heaven and a new earth,’ and the ruler of creation, [the human person], called to and capable of theosis, ‘partaking of the divine nature.’⁵⁰⁹

The truth about humanity and all creation is revealed in the light of the Eucharist. God’s presence permeates human life and the world to transform and deify them in glory.

As Schmemmann notes, the freedom of divine adoption is given to humanity with each ascent of the Divine Liturgy. It is the freedom that comes as a result of acknowledging how truly fitting it is to bless, to praise, to adore and to give thanks to God.⁵¹⁰ As Kesich observes, Fr. Schmemmann “was a free man in Christ; he was a man full of joy.”⁵¹¹ Plekon adds that Schmemmann was “full of joy in the faith and free enough to express this in startling new ways.”⁵¹² Schmemmann surrendered to the transformation in Christ imparted by the Eucharist so as to enter into the freedom and joy of a life of communion with the Triune God.⁵¹³ Schmemmann anchored his life on the Eucharistic Christ, his joy and fullness of freedom.⁵¹⁴

Remembering Until Christ Comes Again

The Last Supper

Christ manifested the Kingdom of God to the Apostles the evening of the last supper.⁵¹⁵ According to Schmemmann, this event is the revelation of Christ’s love and the fulfillment of the purpose of creation.⁵¹⁶ To a darkened world fallen in sin and death, the

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 185.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 181.

⁵¹¹ Veselin Kesich, “Freedom and Joy,” *St. Vladimir’s Theological Quarterly* 28, no.1 (1984); 41, 42.

⁵¹² Plekon, “The Church, The Eucharist and The Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann’s Theological Legacy,” 120.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, 141.

⁵¹⁴ Scorer, “Obituaries: Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983), 67-68.

⁵¹⁵ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 200.

⁵¹⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 200-201.

last supper unveiled the brilliant light of the Kingdom of God. As Schmemmann notes, the last supper manifests the fullness of the revelation of the Kingdom to the Apostles⁵¹⁷ and the inauguration of the Church as the “Sacrament of the Kingdom.”⁵¹⁸ He chides those who reduce the theological meaning of the last supper to the institution of the Eucharist and the priesthood.⁵¹⁹ He argues:

Yes, the institution of the Eucharist did occur at the last supper—but not as ‘another’ institution of the Church, for it is the establishment of the Eucharist as the sacrament of the Church, of her ascent to heaven, of her self-fulfillment at the table of Christ in his kingdom. The last supper, the Church and the Eucharist are ‘linked’ not through an earthly cause-and-effect connection, to which an ‘institution’ is so often lowered, but through their common and single referral to the Kingdom of God—which is manifested at the last supper, granted to the Church and remembered, in its presence and actuality, in the Eucharist.⁵²⁰

The Eucharist is central to the Church’s understanding of herself and to the presence and experience of the Kingdom. The Divine Liturgy acclaims this truth, “Of Thy Mystical Supper, O Son of God, accept me *today* as a communicant.” The Eucharistic experience of the Church accomplishes in the present, the reality of the presence of the Kingdom accomplished by Christ for all generations at the last supper.⁵²¹

Schmemmann cautions those who reduce the theological meaning of the Eucharist by identifying the commemoration of the events of the last supper with Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. This approach often leads to an interpretation of the Eucharist as the commemoration of the sacrifice of the cross.⁵²² The gift of the Kingdom manifested at the last supper reveals the shared divine life in which humankind is called to participate.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, 202.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, 202-203.

Christ's earthly ministry reaches its completion at the last supper. All that Christ accomplishes after the last supper is, according to Schmemmann, "a *consequence* of this manifestation of the Kingdom, as its first, decisive *victory* in the world and over the world."⁵²³ The last supper must not be regarded as the way to acquire the fruits of the cross. God's Kingdom is manifested and granted at the last supper. Christ's ascent to the cross completes the last supper.⁵²⁴

The Cross

As Schmemmann indicates, the love of Christ is the link between the last supper and the cross. Christ's gift of Himself given at the last supper is poured out on the cross so that the Kingdom of God enters the world of sin and darkness. Divine love transforms Christ's death on the cross to the victory of the Kingdom of God over the fallen world. Christ gives himself in loving obedience to the will of the Father so that the world may have life. At the last supper, Christ manifests the Kingdom to the Apostles. On the cross, Christ reveals the victory of the Kingdom over a world tainted by sin and death. The glory of divine love permeates both events.⁵²⁵

According to Schmemmann, Christ's sacrifice is the manifestation and the actualization of the depth of divine love.⁵²⁶ Schmemmann notes that genuine love requires loving and self-giving sacrifice, a concept contrary to the worldly interpretation that links sacrifice to an act of atonement.⁵²⁷ According to Schmemmann, sacrifice understood as suffering is the sacrifice of the world fallen from love into evil and sin. Because Christ's

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, 203-204.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 202-203.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 204-208.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, 207-208.

sacrifice happens in a sinful world, it is truly a “*crucifixion*”⁵²⁸ that puts to death the power of death brought through sin. Christ grants this victory that those who are in the world may experience the joy of the Kingdom. The power of the Kingdom over this world is accomplished for humankind by Christ’s love revealed on the cross and given in each Eucharist.⁵²⁹

Schmemmann believed that the cross was the path to participation in divine life, to *theosis*.⁵³⁰ He writes:

Anyone who would in the smallest degree follow the path of Christ, love him and give himself to him, has this tribulation, recognizes this suffering. The Cross is suffering. But through love and self-sacrifice this same tribulation is transformed into joy. It is experienced as being crucified with Christ, as accepting his Cross and hence taking part in his victory.⁵³¹

The Eucharist is the manifestation of life as loving sacrifice. Christ’s self-giving love revealed on the cross opens the way to the ascent of humankind to the Kingdom of God in the Eucharist, and sharing in the divine life of God.⁵³² Christ’s love embraced Father Alexander with the cross of suffering.⁵³³ His wife, Juliana, describes the moment that her husband learned of his terminal cancer:

It was a moment of total clarity and total lucidity, and the signal for departure on a journey. His acceptance was without emotion, but a great joy entered our lives. It was not the joy of self-sacrifice or of a martyr who accepts his fate. It was joy pure and simple, the joy he had preached all his life, but which was now intensified because one felt that he was seeing the Kingdom, the doors of the Kingdom. Everything else was finished—or rather was about to begin. A lifetime’s struggle to preach, to communicate, to convince was past, while the great journey which, in effect, would set him free had begun. He was like the women to whom Christ appeared after his Resurrection and said: ‘Rejoice!’ His illness and progress towards

⁵²⁸ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, 208-209.

⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁵³¹ *Ibid.*

⁵³² *Ibid.*, 210-211.

⁵³³ Juliana Schmemmann, *Marriage to a Priest*, 29.

death were without a doubt an even more immediate vision of the Lord. With even greater simplicity, with total faith, he waited, as he had once written, for ‘the never-ending day of the Kingdom.’⁵³⁴

Fr. Alexander accepted his suffering as Christ accepted his cross, in loving obedience.

He believed and taught that “in Christ, suffering is not removed, it is transformed into victory,”⁵³⁵ Having lived with his eyes always focused on the Kingdom, Fr. Alexander knew that his cross would lead him there. He writes:

Through [Christ’s] own suffering, not only has all suffering acquired a meaning but it has given the power to become itself the sign, the sacrament, the proclamation, the ‘coming’ of that victory; the defeat of [the human person], [his/her] very dying has become a way of Life.⁵³⁶

Fr. Alexander’s cancer was like a fast moving train that quickly carried his weakened body “towards the doors of the Kingdom [that] were standing open for him.”⁵³⁷ His wife, Juliana observes, “Never had I seen him so radiant, so thankful, so patient.”⁵³⁸ He knew that his cross was lifting him up to the doors of the Kingdom.

Fr. Alexander placed his hope in the victory of the cross that brought joy to the whole world⁵³⁹ and announced to all humankind that Christ is Life.⁵⁴⁰ Fr. Alexander wrote of this life in his only text written in the first person:⁵⁴¹

And if I make this new life mine, mine this hunger and thirst for the Kingdom, mine this expectation of Christ, mine the certitude that Christ is Life, then my very death will be an act of communion with Life. For neither life nor death can separate us from the love of Christ. I do not know when and how the fulfillment will come. I do not know when all things will be consummated in Christ. I know nothing about the ‘whens’ and ‘hows.’ But I know that in Christ this great Passage,

⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁵ Alexander Schmemmann, *O Death, Where Is Thy Sting,*” 107.

⁵³⁶ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 103-104.

⁵³⁷ Schmemmann, *Marriage to a Priest*, 29.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵³⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 204.

⁵⁴⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 104.

⁵⁴¹ Juliana Schmemmann, *Marriage to a Priest*, 29.

the Pascha of the world has begun, that the light of the 'world to come' comes to us in the joy and peace of the Holy Spirit, for Christ is risen and Life reigneth.⁵⁴²

Undeniably, Christ's life consumed Fr. Alexander's in his living and in his dying.

With each Eucharist, Fr. Alexander ate the food of eternal life as a foretaste of the Kingdom in the age to come.⁵⁴³ On December 13, 1983, Fr. Alexander entered into the new life of the risen Lord to feast forever at the banquet table in the Kingdom. This was "the day without evening,"⁵⁴⁴ the day that his Christian journey led him "to the top of Mount Tabor"⁵⁴⁵ to be transformed in the deifying light of the Son of God.

Living in Remembrance

The Eucharistic experience of the Church is the lived reality of the fullness of the economy of salvation. Schmemmann writes;

It is the reality of the world as God's creation, the reality of the world as saved by Christ, the reality of the new heaven and the new earth, to which we ascend in the sacrament of the ascension to the kingdom of God.⁵⁴⁶

The Church remembers, receives, and preserves the treasure of salvation by living its memory. Schmemmann posits that the liturgy that "is served on earth...is accomplished in heaven."⁵⁴⁷ It is, he adds, already accomplished and given in the Church.⁵⁴⁸ Schmemmann clearly argues that the Eucharist is *not* a repetition or a representation of the events of salvation, but an ascent into these mysteries that have already been accomplished and given until the end of time.

⁵⁴² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 106.

⁵⁴³ Alexander Schmemmann, "This is the Blessed Sabbath...(Matins of Great Saturday," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* II, no.2 (1958):7.

⁵⁴⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 106.

⁵⁴⁵ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 88.

⁵⁴⁶ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 221.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

From beginning to end, the liturgy is remembrance of the saving works of God through Christ and the Holy Spirit. Schmemmann describes the fullness of the Church's experience of salvation imparted by the liturgy:⁵⁴⁹

It is the reality of the world as God's creation, the reality of the world as saved by Christ, the reality of the new heaven and the new earth, to which we ascend in the sacrament of the ascension to the Kingdom of God.⁵⁵⁰

Throughout the entire liturgy, the Church invokes the Holy Spirit who transforms all the actions, words and rites into the "new time"⁵⁵¹ of the Kingdom, holding them together in one movement of ascension. Thus, the liturgy becomes symbol in the sense that it actualizes that which it symbolizes. This worldly life is transformed by the Holy Spirit into the new life of the Kingdom of God. As Schmemmann notes, the Holy Spirit transforms everything about the liturgy to manifest its heavenly reality already accomplished for the salvation of the world.⁵⁵²

The *remembrance* concludes with the prayer of *epiclesis*, "we pray Thee and call upon Thee, O Holy of Holies, that by the favor of Thy goodness Thy Holy Spirit may come upon us and upon the gifts now offered..."⁵⁵³ Rather than stress the change of the bread and wine, Schmemmann focuses on the true purpose of the Eucharist, i.e., partaking of the "bread of heaven,"⁵⁵⁴ Christ, the life of the world. The Church also prays that the Eucharist will be a "*communion of the Holy Spirit*"⁵⁵⁵ uniting all those who share in the

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, 223-224.

⁵⁵³ *Ibid.*, 224.

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 225-226.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 226.

Body and Blood of Christ. Clearly, these actions of the Holy Spirit fulfill and manifest the true eschatological nature of the Eucharist as the presence of the Kingdom.⁵⁵⁶

[The Holy Spirit] unites us with Christ, makes us into Christ's Body, into partakers of Christ's Kingship, Priesthood and Prophecy. For the Holy Spirit, being God's Life, is truly the Life of Christ; He is in a unique way His Spirit. Christ, by giving us His Life, gives us the Holy Spirit; and the Holy Spirit, by descending upon us and abiding in us, gives us Him Whose Life He is.⁵⁵⁷

Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology holds together the saving works of Christ and the transforming and deifying work of the Holy Spirit. The sacrament of remembrance consummates the many parts of the Eucharistic liturgy and actualizes the Church as the Body of Christ for whom salvation is imparted.

Conclusion

Impassioned by the conviction that God has called his people to "participate in the heavenly mystery, to communion with heaven in the here and now in this earthly life,"⁵⁵⁸ Fr. Alexander committed his entire life's work to the restoration of the Eucharist as the transformation in Christ⁵⁵⁹ that leads to the ultimate destiny and fulfillment of humanity in communion with God. He taught that the Eucharist is the fulfillment of the Church as the presence of the Kingdom and the revelation of the joy of the Kingdom of God's glory;⁵⁶⁰ a joy that was "the true substance of [Fr. Alexander's] life."⁵⁶¹ As Meyendorff observes, this joy radiated from Fr. Alexander when he celebrated the Divine Liturgy.⁵⁶²

⁵⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵⁷ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 106-107.

⁵⁵⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 198.

⁵⁵⁹ Plekon, "The Church, the Eucharist and the Kingdom: Towards an Assessment of Alexander Schmemmann's Theological Legacy," 139.

⁵⁶⁰ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 190-191.

⁵⁶¹ Juliana Schmemmann, ed., *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemmann 1973-1983*, 8.

⁵⁶² Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

The Eucharistic vision of Alexander Schmemmann embraces the theological vision of the early Fathers of the Church which affirms that the ultimate destiny of the human person rests in union with God. Like the Fathers, Schmemmann believes that the vocation of the human person, the *telos* for which [he/she] is created, is to become partakers of divinity. Schmemmann posits that the Eucharist is the sacrament that deifies humanity and all creation. The Eucharist has the power to transform all of existence. It offers the all-embracing vision of life that reveals humanity's true relationship to God, to others and to the world. Schmemmann's vision of the Eucharist is a theology of personhood based on the belief that the human person finds fulfillment and true freedom in communion with God.

Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision finds its source in baptism. He posits that baptism restores humanity to the newness of the life of Christ and imparts their vocation as priest, prophet and king of creation. Baptism reveals the sacramentality of the world where divinity meets humanity. Schmemmann believes that the Eucharist is the fulfillment of Baptism because it reveals the true meaning of creation restored in Christ, who makes all things new by filling them with Himself.

The cosmic, ecclesiological and eschatological dimensions of the Eucharist frame Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology. According to Schmemmann, the Eucharistic experience of the Church is always cosmic because it assumes all creation into Christ.⁵⁶³ In the Eucharist, Christ restores all natural substances, revealing in this act the consummation of all creation at the end of time. Eucharistic bread and wine are the manifestation of Christ as the food of Life. Humanity is united with divinity in the

⁵⁶³ Alexander Schmemmann, "Worship In A Secular Age," *Saint Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 16, no.1 (1972): 7.

Eucharist and creation's purpose is restored as the means of communion with God.⁵⁶⁴ In the Eucharist, Schmemmann affirms that Christ transforms all of life by filling it with Himself and restoring it to what it was meant to be. Schmemmann believes the true essence of the Church is revealed in her manifestation of the power and presence of the Kingdom in this fallen world; a presence made possible in and through the Eucharist. He notes that the entire Divine Liturgy, "from beginning to end... is a *remembrance*, manifestation, "epiphany" [of] the salvation of the world accomplished by Christ."⁵⁶⁵ He submits that the faithful receive this reality in its fullness in the Church as the content of Christian life.⁵⁶⁶ The Eucharist transforms and deifies the Church in the ascent where She "fulfills herself as *heaven on earth*"⁵⁶⁷ and is lifted up to the table of the Lord in His heavenly Kingdom.⁵⁶⁸ Schmemmann's most compelling contribution of his Eucharistic vision accentuates the eschatological character of the sacrament. The Eucharist, he claims, leads the Church out of the fallen world into the joy of the Kingdom of God where all life begins, ends and receives its meaning. The Kingdom is the eschatological reality that holds all things together. Communion in the Body and Blood of Christ is a participation in divine nature and a promise of communion that will be perfected in the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Kingdom, fulfills the Church as the presence of the Kingdom in this world. In the Eucharist, the Church passes from the world of sin and death to the coming Kingdom and participates in the ascension of her

⁵⁶⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 43.

⁵⁶⁵ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 221.

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 190.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 191.

Lord and His messianic banquet.⁵⁶⁹ Grace, granted in the Holy Spirit, imparts the joy and peace that comes from the “abiding of Someone Who Himself *is* Life, Joy, Peace, Beauty, Fullness, Bliss,”⁵⁷⁰ the Holy Spirit. With each Eucharistic communion, the Church understands the mission imparted to those who belong to the Kingdom.⁵⁷¹

The Eucharist is always the End, the sacrament of the parousia, and yet it is always the beginning, the starting point: now mission begins. ‘We have seen the true light, we have enjoyed life eternal,’ but this life, this light, are given to us in order to ‘transform’ us into Christ’s witnesses in this world. Without this ascension into the Kingdom we would have had nothing to witness to. Now, having once more become ‘His people and His inheritance,’ we can do what Christ wants us to do: “You are witnesses of these things.’ (Lk 24:48) The Eucharist, transforming ‘the church into what it is,’ transforms it into mission.⁵⁷²

Fr. Alexander’s Eucharistic vision led him to rediscover the “sacramental character in the whole of life,”⁵⁷³ In his view, Eucharist gives meaning to all things and reveals the only true life of humankind as Eucharistic. Called to transform this world into life in God and communion with Him, humankind journeys in love, obedience and thanksgiving to witness to Christ and His works of salvation.⁵⁷⁴

Fr. Alexander’s Eucharistic vision of life enabled him to receive all of life as “divine life made food, made life for [humankind].”⁵⁷⁵ Christ is the Food of all food, the Life of all life, the Love of all love for the salvation of the world. Within this mystery, Fr. Alexander understood the depths of the human vocation as “*homo*

⁵⁶⁹ Schmemann, “The Missionary Imperative,” 212.

⁵⁷⁰ Schmemann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 105-106.

⁵⁷¹ Schmemann, “The Missionary Imperative,” 213-214.

⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁷³ Alexander Schmemann, “The World as Sacrament,” *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West* (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1979), 218.

⁵⁷⁴ Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 34-35.

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 14.

adorans”⁵⁷⁶ to share in divine life through deification. His life was a response of thanksgiving, of Eucharist. He writes:

Life comes to us as a Gift, a free and divine gift... Everything is free, nothing is due and yet all is given... Therefore, the greatest humility and obedience is to accept the Gift, to say yes—in joy and gratitude. There is nothing we can do, yet we become all that God wanted us to be from eternity, when we are eucharistic.⁵⁷⁷

Fr. Alexander celebrated the Eucharist for the last time in this world on Thanksgiving Day at St. Vladimir’s Seminary Chapel. At the end of the Liturgy, he gave his final thanksgiving, his “farewell sermon”.⁵⁷⁸

Everyone capable of thanksgiving is capable of salvation and eternal joy.

Thank you, O Lord, for having accepted this Eucharist, which is offered to the Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and which filled our hearts with ‘the joy, peace and righteousness in the Holy Spirit.’

Thank you, O Lord, for having revealed Yourself unto us and for giving us the foretaste of Your Kingdom.

Thank you, O Lord, for having united us to one another, in serving You and Your Holy Church.

Thank you, O Lord, for having helped us to overcome all difficulties, tensions, passions and temptations and for having restored peace, mutual love and joy in sharing the communion of the Holy Spirit.

Thank You, O Lord, for the sufferings you have bestowed upon us, for they are purifying us from selfishness and remind us of the ‘one thing needed.’ your eternal Kingdom.

Thank you, O Lord, for having given us this country where we are free to worship You.

Thank you, O Lord, for this school, where the name of God is proclaimed.

Thank you, O Lord, for our families, husbands, wives and especially, children, who teach us how to celebrate Your Holy Name, in joy, movement and holy

⁵⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵⁷⁸ Scorer, “Obituaries: Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983),” 68.

noise.

Thank you, O Lord, for everyone and everything. Great are you, O Lord, and marvelous are your deeds, and no word is sufficient to celebrate Your miracles.

Lord, it is good to be here!

Amen.⁵⁷⁹

Fr. Alexander's thanksgiving prayer reflects his inner disposition of gratitude, joy, and loving obedience to the cross. It is a prayer oriented towards the coming of the Kingdom of God, the driving force of his life. Aware that his passage from this life to the next was immanent, Fr. Alexander reminds the Church that salvation comes to those who give thanks, i.e., to those whose lives are Eucharistic. His final words are a reminder of the profession of Peter on Mt. Tabor, enveloped in the glory of the divine Son of God, "Lord, it is good to be here," (Mt 17:4) as well as a testimony to the revelation of the Son of God in the Eucharist, the foretaste of the Kingdom.

Schmemmann once wrote that true Christian life is best expressed on Great Saturday before Pascha when the Church no longer sees the tomb in terms of death, but as the source of life *and* the expectation of the true Paschal joy of the Resurrection.⁵⁸⁰ Seeing the end, one desires to reach it more and more. The Paschal liturgy of the Church blesses, sanctifies and gives meaning to all of life as a "step on that long journey to Mount Tabor so that, like Peter, one cries out, "Lord, it is good for us to be here." (Mt 17:4)⁵⁸¹ On the Great Saturday of Fr. Alexander's life, he, like Peter, embraced the

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 68-69.

⁵⁸⁰ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 88.

⁵⁸¹ *Ibid.*

deifying light of the Eucharistic Christ as he proclaimed, “Lord, it is good to be here!”⁵⁸² His eyes were focused on the glory of the transfigured Christ soon to embrace him in one final act of transformation. On December 13, 1983, Fr. Alexander entered into the true Pascal joy of the Resurrection as he passed from this world in an ascent to the Kingdom of God to partake of His divine life for all eternity.

The investigation will now turn toward the West to identify those Western theologians whose work contributed to the theological vision of Alexander Schmemmann. A brief survey of the work of Romano Guardini, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou, and Louis Bouyer will provide the theological milieu of the twentieth century to shed light on the liturgical and ecclesial renewal that permeated both Christian traditions. An explication of the Eucharistic treatises of Marie-Vincent Bernadot and Jean-Marie Roger Tillard will support the writer’s supposition that hints of *theosis* were present in Western Christian Eucharisitic theologies.

⁵⁸² Scorer, “Obituaries: Alexander Schmemmann (1921-1983),” 68.

CHAPTER FIVE
HINTS OF *THEOSIS* IN WESTERN EUCHARISTIC THEOLOGIES
OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Introduction

Vestiges of the turbulence of the nineteenth century seeped into the structures of Church life in the Western tradition. The political, philosophical and cultural changes of the time were reflected in the hierarchical, ecclesiological and liturgical dimensions of the Church. “Secular humanism with its faith in inevitable progress through science and technology” made way to a growth in “urbanization,... industrial capitalism and rivalry for colonial empires.” It was an era that generated a “non-Christian culture” and “radical revolutionary movements.”¹ Krieg posits that the “intellectual arrogance and the political absolutism” of this century prompted Pope Pius IX and the First Vatican Council to declare the Church a “perfect society” which must serve as a guardian of the truth and a safeguard against a world rebelling against God.² He submits that the first Vatican Council enclosed Catholicism in itself, isolating the Church from the modern world.³ To make matters worse, Pius IX protested the Italian invasion of Vatican City and the papal lands in 1870, by refusing to give the traditional ceremonial blessing, “*Urbi et Orbi*” and making himself a “prisoner of the Vatican.” The blessing was withheld for fifty-one years by the next three pontiffs: Leo XIII, Pius X, and Benedict XV.⁴ Pope Leo XIII

¹ Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., *The Dominicans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 190.

² Hermann J. Pottmeyer, “Vatican Council I,” in *The HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, Richard P. McBrien, ed., (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1995); quoted in Robert A. Krieg, C.S.C., *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 1.

³ Krieg, 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

sought to remedy the dangers posed by secular humanism and the narrowing of religious and moral thought by restoring the philosophy and theology of Thomas Aquinas in Catholic thought. To this end, he published the encyclical, *Aeterni Patris* (1879) in hopes of reinstating Thomistic philosophy within seminaries so that Christian thinkers would have the “adequate philosophical resources” to “make an effective Catholic contribution to the intellectual life of Europe.”⁵ *Aeterni Patris* sparked a movement in the latter part of the nineteenth century known as Neo-Thomism or Neo-Scholasticism.⁶ More than a “return to the Middle Ages,” the “third scholasticism” was an attempt to respond to the challenges of scientific and philosophical advancements in the light of Christian faith.⁷ Vatican I also promulgated a “Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ,” *Pastor Aeternus*. The constitution clearly conveys the identity of the Church as institutional and also includes a statement on papal infallibility. “The Church has all the qualities of a true society...[I]t is so perfect in itself that, although it is distinct from all other human societies, it is nevertheless far superior to them.”⁸ The institutional character of Western Christian ecclesiology remained until the Second Vatican Council.⁹ Liturgy assumed the “baroque form” of the 1600’s until the Abbey of Solesmes, Prosper Louis Pascal Guéranger (1805-1875) began a liturgical renewal that would gain official recognition by

⁵ Gerald McCool, *The Neo-Thomists* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1994), 1-2.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 1.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 1, 21.

⁸ Vatican Council I, The First Draft of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church of Christ, in John Clarkson *et al.*, eds., and trans., *The Church Teacher* (St. Louis: B. Herder, 1955), 88; quoted In Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 46.

⁹ Krieg, 46.

Pope Pius X in the early twentieth century.¹⁰ Until then, the Catholic Christian experience of worship is best summarized by the following text:

The Mass was similar to a performance in which the priest acted out a drama at the altar, while each member of the congregation passively watched or prayed private devotions. Responses to the priest's prayers came in whispers from the acolytes or, on Sundays and at funerals, perhaps from an organist or choir. For most weekday masses, the priest ignored the feast of the saint and, vested in black, said a requiem mass. If it were a 'high mass,' the priest sang the prayers and was answered in song only by the organist or choir. Since there existed no missal with the prayers and readings of the day, most people had only a vague idea of what the priest was whispering in Latin at the altar. Also, the people rarely shared in 'Holy Communion,' and, when they did, they usually did so before or after mass.¹¹

Clearly, the Western Christian Church in nineteenth century Europe reacted to the instability of an era that was distancing itself more and more from its Christian past through "the empiricism, rationalism, and skepticism [that] modern philosophy and modern science had spread among the educated..."¹² by distancing herself from the world.

The rapid advances in science, technology, economics and communication ushered in the twentieth century and an age of unprecedented changes in the Church. The Church of Vatican I evolved into the "Church in the modern world" and a Second Vatican Council.¹³ The promulgations of this historic gathering inaugurated a vision of the Church never before known in its history: a vision that led the Church into the third millennium where She continues to unravel its promises and challenges. Undoubtedly, the most significant breakthrough for the Church of the mid-twentieth century was the shift in her self-understanding as primarily an "institution" to her identity as the "mystery

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 71-72.

¹¹ Bernard Botte, *From Silence to Participation*, trans. John Sullivan (Washington D.C.: The Pastoral Press, 1988), 1-8; quoted in Krieg, 71.

¹² McCool, 35.

¹³ Krieg, 2.

[that] shares in the ineffable life of the triune God,” and “the people of God.”¹⁴ Post-conciliar ecumenical studies spurred an interest in an ecclesiology that embraced the notion of *Koinonia*; an ecclesiological vision which had taken hold in nineteenth century Russian Orthodoxy. An ecclesiology of communion has its roots in the community of Pentecost as the “manifestation...[of] the very essence of the Church.”

The Spirit, the apostolic witness which centers on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion in which the human multitude and its diversity are contained within this unity and where the unity is expressed in the multitude and diversity.¹⁵

Khomiakov, a prominent figure in the “renaissance of Russian ecclesiology,”¹⁶ described the Church in terms of *sobornost* or “catholicity.” He called upon Russian Christians to be living witnesses to “the experience of the Church as a unanimity that is lived in love.”¹⁷ Bouyer explains Khomiakov’s challenge:

Because Christian truth is the truth of evangelical love, he says it can be preserved and understood only in the community in which this love is seen, the Church. The truth, then, is not preserved by any authority outside and above the Church, any more than it can be attained or retained by individualistic efforts. It is the whole Christian people, through their whole experience of the Christian life, nourished by common participation in the liturgy, who alone are its guardian, just as the people alone, within this living unity, can experience it.¹⁸

Tillard concurs that Church identity is determined by its life and is “woven into the fabric of the Liturgies, the catecheses, the homilies of the Fathers, the acts of the martyrs.”¹⁹

The “ecclesial being...becomes real”²⁰ when the same faith is confessed, the same

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

¹⁵ J.-M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 8.

¹⁶ Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit*, (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 133.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Tillard, 2.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

sacraments are celebrated, the same charity is practiced, the same fruits of holiness are apparent and the same witness is given by her martyrs.²¹ Tillard is one of many prominent theological voices of the late twentieth century who proposed that ecclesial communion is the only authentic Christian identity.²² His thinking retrieves the common tradition of the early Church whose ecclesial experience was Eucharistic.

Chapter Five will turn its attention to the Western Christian Church in search of ‘Latins’ of the twentieth century whose work intimates a correlation between *theosis* and the Eucharist. The investigation will target the work of two French Dominicans whose contributions to twentieth century ecclesiology were rooted in a Eucharistic vision that reflected the spirit of the Eastern Fathers and contained *theosis* themes. Marie-Vincent Bernadot and Jean-Marie Tillard will represent the mid and the latter twentieth century, respectively. Their Eucharistic treatises, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity* (Bernadot) and *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église* (Tillard) will provide the content from which to base the argument of this chapter that hints of *theosis* were apparent in Western Christian twentieth century Eucharistic visions. As a preface to their work, however, the chapter will begin with an exposé of the contributions of prominent Western theologians of the twentieth century whose work fostered a revival of ecclesiological and liturgical thought in the West as well as the East. The enormous scope of the work of these theological giants would be impossible to include in this investigation. However, the first section of the chapter will highlight the elements of their work that paralleled Schmemmann’s thought, and, in several cases, greatly influenced his own thinking.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² J.-M.-R. Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), vii.

Notable among these great Western influences in Schmemmann's life's work are: Romano Guardini, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou and Louis Bouyer. Their work launched the Church of the twentieth century into uncharted territories, preparing the way for the Eucharistic and ecclesial developments of Bernadot and Tillard.

Romano Guardini, often referred to as the "precursor to Vatican II,"²³ guides the Church into the twentieth century in an effort to renew the Church's self-understanding of her nature and mission. In his eulogy for Guardini, Karl Rahner notes that Guardini was "one of the earliest proponents"²⁴ of ecclesial renewal in the twentieth century. He recalls:

This humanist scholar died in a Church that was quite different from the Church into which he was born. The Church of Vatican I saw itself as a fortress or bastion of truth against the errors of the Enlightenment: in contrast, the Church of Vatican II sees itself as a pilgrim people on its way, in dialogue with other peoples, to the reign of God.²⁵

Guardini's theological vision embraces many of the themes apparent in Schmemmann's work. Like Schmemmann, who was also considered a pastoral theologian, Guardini was concerned with restoring the liturgy to its rightful place in Christian life; "the *lex orandi*," "the treasure-house of the thought of Revelation."²⁶ His holistic approach to liturgy designates a continuous movement of ascent towards heaven where all things are perfected. In reference to the liturgical space, he cautions the faithful to attend to "the most commonplace everyday objects and actions" that have the power "to hide matters of

²³ Robert A. Krieg, CSC, "A Precursor's Life and Work," in *Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*, ed. Robert A. Krieg, CSC (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 25. See also Robert A. Krieg, CSC, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997), 11.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 26.

²⁶ Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic and The Spirit of the Liturgy* (New York: Sheed & Ward Inc., 1935), 121-124.

deep import, noting that under the simplest exteriors lie the greatest mysteries.”²⁷

Secondly, Guardini’s inductive approach to theological thinking broke with the neo-scholastic deductive method and paved the way for the Second Vatican Council to begin to dialogue with the problems facing the Church at that time. Like Schmemmann, who openly rejected neo-scholasticism and harbored ambivalence toward historical theology, Guardini’s work was lacking in historical investigation. Krieg posits that Guardini deliberately “steered clear of critical methods and their results” to avoid censure by the Vatican. His method failed to correlate his ideas to Church doctrine, thus leaving a serious gap in his theological development.²⁸ Nevertheless, Krieg says of this “theological pioneer” that he was the bridge between the Church of Pope Pius IX and the Church of Pope John XXIII.²⁹

Yves Congar was among the group of French theologians whose theological contributions laid much of the foundation for the Second Vatican Council. His ecclesiological vision for the Church of the twentieth century was a plea for wholeness and a call for unity among all Christians. He urged an ecclesial renewal from within that was open for a renewed spirit of ecumenism. Congar also saw a pressing need to link theology to anthropology in order to facilitate a clearer vision of the unity between the human and the divine. He writes:

The greatest misfortune perhaps that has afflicted modern Catholicism is to have concerned itself with theory and catechesis about the en soi of God and religion, without adding to this at all times the significance that this has for [humankind].³⁰

²⁷ Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St. Louis: Pio Decimo Press, 1955), 34.

²⁸ Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor to Vatican II*, 20-21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

³⁰ Yves Congar, “Christ in the Economy of Salvation and in our Dogmatic Tracts,” trans. by Aimée Bourneuf, *Concilium*, 1 (1966), 11; quoted in Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar’s*

Congar believes that the Church is partly responsible for unbelief because She “believes rather than expresses her true nature.”³¹ His “concern for the world and humanity”³² is resolved in an ecclesiology that relates them to God and to Christ. While clearly “God-centered,” Congar indicates that Christ is the “ultimate reference point for all renewal and reform in the Church.”³³

Of course we reach a knowledge of the intimate mystery of God only through Jesus Christ...and from God..., but it is only by means of the mystery of God that we can believe fully in the mystery of the incarnation, and therefore, can understand Jesus Christ...³⁴

Lastly, Congar’s discovery of the Church of the East, imbued in him “*le sens eschatologique*” and a desire to restore a sense of wholeness to all of Christendom.

Ultimately, his vision of the Church was a communion ecclesiology³⁵ in search of Christian unity.

Elements of Jean Daniélou’s work with symbolism in sacramental worship and secularism are detected in Schmemmann’s thought. Daniélou investigates the symbolism of sacramental worship in the age of the early Fathers and traces the “tradition” of “its

Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 76.

³¹ Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (1966), 23; quoted in Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar’s Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 75.

³² *Ibid.*, 76.

³³ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁴ Congar, “Christ in the Economy of Salvation and in our Dogmatic Tracts,” 12; quoted in Flynn, *Yves Congar’s Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 77.

³⁵ Timothy I. MacDonald, *The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar: Foundational Themes* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 30.

biblical character” to the time of the Apostles.³⁶ Relying on the documents of mystagogic catechesis and patristic texts, he argues:

The life of ancient Christianity was centered around worship. And worship was not considered to be a collection of rites meant to sanctify secular life. The sacraments were thought of as the essential events of Christian existence, and of existence itself, as being the prolongation of the great works of God in the Old Testament and the New. In them was inaugurated a new creation which introduced the Christian even now into the Kingdom of God.³⁷

Daniélou notes the eschatological nature of the sacraments, a theme that resonates in Schmemmann’s theology. Like Schmemmann, he posits the centrality of worship in Christian life.

Daniélou interprets the Eucharistic liturgy from the perspective of the two major themes that are woven in the entire ordo: 1) “the Mass is a sacramental representation of the sacrifice of the Cross,” and 2) “the Mass is a sacramental participation in the heavenly liturgy.”³⁸ Daniélou also argues that the fullness of the mystery of the Trinity is revealed in the Incarnate Word. His claim supports the thesis of this investigation that the Eucharist is the means by which the faithful participate in the life of the triune God, i.e., the Eucharist is the means of *theosis*. He notes, “For Christianity is the appeal addressed to [humankind] by the Father, inviting him[her] to share in the life of the Son through the gift of the Spirit.”³⁹ Secondly, Daniélou warns against the danger of secularism that

³⁶ Jean Daniélou, S.J., *The Bible and the Liturgy* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 4.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

³⁹ Jean Daniélou, *God and the Ways of Knowing* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1957), 140.

seeks to eliminate the “very existence of a religious experience and a religious presence within the state.”⁴⁰ These issues will be reviewed in light of Schmemmann’s work.

Louis Bouyer calls for an ecclesial renewal and a rediscovery of the Eucharist. He examines the Church’s nature and mission as put forth by the conciliar documents of Vatican II, with an emphasis on the Church as the Body of Christ. Bouyer writes:

This is the sense and content of the Eucharistic celebration; and this is the supreme Revelation, as it were, of the unity of the Church: the ‘communion’ of the Church.⁴¹ The Unity, the communion of the agape—of the very love that makes the eternal life of the Father—is the communication of the Spirit of the Father, who is also the Spirit of the Son, because it is the communion in the Body (i.e., in the concrete, total human existence, definitively glorified through the cross, the Son of God made man), the communion in his Blood (i.e., in his life, which from now on is transfigured, ‘divinized’)⁴²

Bouyer adds that the proper nature of the Church is Eucharistic because She is most truly herself in “her union with Christ...through the Eucharist.”⁴³ Bouyer’s contributions to ecclesial renewal in the twentieth century are informed by his liturgical vision which he unfolds in his *magnum opus*, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*. He, like Schmemmann, challenges the Church “to rediscover a ‘eucharist’ that is living and real.”⁴⁴ He proposes that such a rediscovery consists in uncovering the meaning of the Eucharist in its “constitutive prayers, its basic themes and their living unity.”⁴⁵ Bouyer argues that an ecclesiology of communion offers a viable avenue of reconciliation

⁴⁰ Jean Daniélou, *The Crucial Questions: On Problems Facing the Church Today* (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 20-21.

⁴¹ J.M.R. Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église* (Paris, 1964); quoted in Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 296.

⁴² Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit* (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 296.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 297.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 474.

for a divided Church that was established by Christ in unity. He upholds that the “greatest scandal for the faith,” the “preeminent scandal” of the Church, rests in the division between the Orthodox and the Catholic Church.⁴⁶ No true renewal of the Church or rediscovery of the Eucharist is ever genuine so long as there is division between the Church of the East and the West.

Having established the theological climate of the twentieth century, the investigation will turn to the spiritual tradition of the Order of Preachers to examine the “spirit of the founder,”⁴⁷ Dominic de Guzman, in relation to the significance of the liturgy in Dominican life. Bernadot submits that the Dominican must reflect on “Jesus and in Him the Holy Trinity” and to continuously ponder the mysteries of Christ. He adds, “This is the reason why the Dominican soul is urged to live the liturgy, for the liturgy is, as it were, the prolongation of the mysteries of Christ.”⁴⁸ As a “priestly and contemplative” Order, the entire day of the “Friars Preachers” was fitted around the liturgical worship of God.⁴⁹

Chapter Five will then proceed to explicate the Eucharistic treatises of two French Dominicans, Bernadot and Tillard, in an attempt to uncover the themes of *theosis* that are implicated in the texts. Hidden within the language of early twentieth century theology, one discovers the core principles of *theosis* in Bernadot’s treatment of the Eucharist. The

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 511-512.

⁴⁷ Recommendations of the Second Vatican Council to religious communities as an exhortation to renewal, not a “return to ‘the primitive observance’ as understood by the previous notion of ‘reform.’” See Ashley, *The Dominicans*, 15.

⁴⁸ Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., “The Place of the Liturgy in Dominican Spirituality,” *Dominican Spirituality*, trans. Anselm M. Townsend, O.P., (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1934), 88.

⁴⁹ William A. Hinnebusch, O.P., *The History of the Dominican Order: Origins and Growth to 1500* (Staten Island: Alba House, 1966), 347.

title, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity* supports the thesis that the Eucharist is the means of participation in the divine life of the Trinity, the goal of *theosis*. Bernadot refers to the ultimate destiny of the human person as realized in Christ with these words from the text:

To live in Jesus, sums up and facilitates everything, places the Christian in regular... communication with God, helps him to realize his vocation which may be fully expressed in these few brief words: by Jesus to enter into relations of intimacy with God our Father in the Holy Spirit, who is subsistent and eternal Love.⁵⁰

In Bernadot's view, assimilation into Christ is the means of union with the divine Trinity of Persons. He describes this union as "relations of intimacy," the notion expressed by the early Fathers as *perichoresis*. The chapter concludes with an analysis of Tillard's text, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*. From the introductory remarks, one is lead into the assurance that this work will reflect, in a striking manner, the rootedness of Tillard's Eucharistic vision in the spirit of the Eastern Fathers of the Church, a vision steeped in the doctrine of *theosis*.

Ce livre veut simplement mettre en lumière les enracinements d'une vérité traditionnelle en ecclésiologie et en théologie sacramentaire: 'l'Eucharistie Fait l'Église...'

Pour cela, nous laisserons parler l'Écriture, nous écouterons les commentaires que les Pères font de ces textes révélés...après avoir rapidement évoqué notion chrétienne du Salut en Jésus Seigneur, nous montrerons comment toutes leurs affirmations s'enracinent dans la certitude universelle que le sacrement de la Table du Seigneur accomplit la Pâque de l'église en marche vers le Royaume eschatologique.⁵¹

Our purpose in writing this book is simply to underscore the roots of traditional truth in ecclesiology and sacramental theology: "*The Eucharist Makes the Church.*" ...To do this, we shall let Scripture speak, and we shall listen to the commentaries of the Fathers on the revealed texts...After reviewing the Christian notion of

⁵⁰ Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, trans. Dom Francis Izard, O.S.B. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1952), 2.

⁵¹ J.-M.R. Tillard, O.P., *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1964), 7.

salvation in the Lord Jesus, we shall show especially how the affirmations of these documents are rooted in the universal certainty that the Sacrament of the Lord's

Table effects the Pasch of the Church on the way to the Eschatological Kingdom.⁵²

Tillard develops the theme of the Eucharist as the "Sacrament of Salvation," a salvation that is a *Pasch* or a passage. "Mais en quoi consiste ce Salut que Jésus nous apporte? Essentiellement en un passage de la condition pécheresse (avec tout ce qu'elle implique) à la condition de la charité...un passage du monde du péché au monde du Dieu."⁵³ ("But of what does this Salvation which Jesus brings us consist? Essentially, it consists of a *passage* from the world of sin into the world of God.")⁵⁴ The mystery of the Eucharist is comprised of two powerful moments:

Il nous faut attarder sur ce point si nous voulons comprendre en profondeur le mystère de l'Eucharistie (sacrement du Salut). Car notre Salut est une Pâque, un passage, donc un mouvement. Et cela moyennant deux temps forts: un temps d'arrachement, de délivrance d'un état d'oppression, et un temps de projection dans un univers merveilleux, dépassant tout ce que notre nature postulait, don de l'unique agape de Dieu. Il y a donc, dans le Salut, à la fois la rive de l'Égypte, rive de la 'servitude' (Ex 2:23), et la rive de la Terre promise, rive de l'espérance et de la vie. Le 'passage' de l'une à l'autre exige deux interventions de la puissance de Dieu, une selon laquelle il introduit dans les biens gratuits de la Promesse. Une notion exacte du Salut doit sans cesse tenir compte de ces deux dimensions.⁵⁵

We must slow up on this aspect if we want to understand in depth the mystery of the Eucharist, the 'Sacrament of Salvation.' For our Salvation is a Pasch, a passage, a movement, accomplished in two powerful moments, a moment of destruction, of deliverance from oppression, and of projection into a wondrous universe, Surpassing all that our nature ever assumed could be true, the gift of the unique agape of God. Hence, Salvation is at once the shore of Egypt, the shore of 'servitude' (Ex 2:23), and the shore of the Promised Land, the shore of hope and of life. The 'passage' from the one to the other demands two interventions of God's power, one by which he breaks the bonds of captivity, the other by which he leads [humanity]

⁵² J.-M.R. Tillard, O.P., *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, trans. Dennis L. Wienk (Staten Island: Alba House, 1967), 13.

⁵³ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 17.

⁵⁴ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 20.

⁵⁵ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 18.

into the free inheritance of the Promise. An exact notion of Salvation must always take into account these two dimensions.⁵⁶

The investigation will argue that it is within Tillard's theory of the two moments of salvation that the doctrine of *theosis* can be discovered.

The Liturgical Movement and the Encounter Between East and West

As Benedictine abbeys were established in Europe in the nineteenth century, the movement to reform liturgical life spread. Prominent among these monasteries were the Abbey of Maria Laach (1892) and the Abbey of Mont-César (1899). Lambert Beauduin, a monk from the Abbey of Mont-César, called for a renewal of liturgical life that spread beyond the confines of the monasteries to the life of the laity. His monumental text, *La piété de l'Église*, emphasized Pope Pius X's call for "active participation" by the faithful in the celebration of the sacred mysteries. Its purpose was to help the laity better understand the liturgical texts and the rites used in worship. The "academic circle" that was instituted at the Abbey of Maria Laach included Odo Casel and the series *Ecclesia Orans*, which reported the groups' findings and whose first text was Romano Guardini's *The Spirit of the Liturgy*.⁵⁷ Liturgical reform was now spilling over into parish life while the leaders in twentieth century liturgical renewal were beginning to emerge.

The Western pioneers of the liturgical renewal turned toward the East and the Russian Orthodox *émigrés* in France to begin a much needed dialogue whose positive and lasting effects were felt in both traditions. The leaders of the liturgical movement

⁵⁶ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 21.

⁵⁷ Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 72-73.

observed that “Orthodox worship bears witness to the ‘great liturgical prayer’ [and spirit] of the early Church.”⁵⁸ Schmemmann notes:

Even though the liturgical revival as an organized movement arose and developed for the most part among non-Orthodox people in the West, it has nevertheless a deep internal bond with the Church in the East, and is therefore of special interest to Orthodox theologians...it can be regarded as a kind of ‘Orthodox’ movement in a non-Orthodox context since this is the restoration in the thought and life of the Church of those emphases and categories which were in some measure lost by the Christian West.⁵⁹

Beauduin’s work sparked a movement in the revival of liturgical life that was oriented towards a theological renewal.⁶⁰ He argues that Christians must be more grounded in the true nature of worship and the centrality of the Eucharist in their everyday lives. His desire to “change the routine and monotonous assistance at acts of worship into active and intelligent participation” intends to “arouse a slumbering faith” and a liturgical “consciousness” lost in their souls.⁶¹ Ultimately, the spirit of the liturgical renewal in the early twentieth century embraced a “renewed sense of the centrality of the liturgy in all aspects of the Church’s life and thought”⁶² in both Catholic and Orthodox traditions.

Romano Guardini and *The Spirit of the Liturgy*⁶³

Romano Guardini’s first visit to the Benedictine Abbey of Beuron introduced him to the true nature of liturgical worship. As he prayed Compline with the monks, he was

⁵⁸ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 15.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ Thomas Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed., Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 1-2.

⁶¹ Lambert Beauduin, O.S.B., *Liturgy the Life of the Church*, Popular Liturgical Library series I, number 1 (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1926), 10-11; quoted in Fisch, *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, 2.

⁶² Fisch, 3.

⁶³ Taken from Guardini’s seminal text, *Vom Geist Der Liturgie (The Spirit of the Liturgy)*, published in 1918.

absorbed in the sacred world of the liturgy. He writes, “Through the whole Church moved mystery, sacred and simultaneously soothing. I eventually saw that the liturgy has a great deal of power and glory.”⁶⁴ Upon his return visits to the abbey and further exposure to communal liturgical worship, Guardini began to realize the absurdity of the practice of private devotions of the faithful during the celebration of the Eucharistic liturgy as celebrated in parishes. In 1918, as a result of these reflections, Guardini put forth his classic text on *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, a work that would play a significant role in the liturgical movement of the twentieth century.⁶⁵ Besides distinguishing between private prayer and liturgical worship, this seminal text defines the true nature of liturgy.

The liturgy is the Church’s public and lawful act of worship, and it is performed and conducted by the officials whom the Church herself has designated for the post—her priests...It [the liturgy] condenses into prayer the entire body of religious truth. Indeed, it is nothing else but truth expressed in terms of prayer.⁶⁶

Guardini’s leadership in the movement to revive liturgical worship in the parishes continued for the remainder of his life with results that were felt in the entire Church, particularly for his contributions to the Vatican II document, *Sacrosanctum concilium*.⁶⁷

Guardini echoes Beauduin’s thinking on the centrality of the liturgy in Christian life. He writes:

The internal revival of the Catholic community will not make progress until the liturgy again occupies its rightful position in Catholic life. And the Eucharistic movement can only effectually distribute its blessings when it is in close touch with the liturgy... Only when the Blessed Sacrament is understood from the point of view of the liturgy can it take that active share in the religious regeneration of the world which Pius X expected of it. (In the same way the full active and moral power of the Blessed Sacrament is only free to operate unchecked when its connection with the problems and tasks of public and family life, and with those of Christian charity and of

⁶⁴ Romano Guardini, *Berichte über mein Leben* (1984), 87-88; quoted in Krieg, 74.

⁶⁵ Krieg, 75, 78.

⁶⁶ Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic and the Spirit of the Liturgy*, 122, 127.

⁶⁷ Krieg, 86.

vocational occupations, is fully comprehended.)⁶⁸

He posits that the liturgy is the “best teacher of the *via ordinaria*”(common way) based on the fact that it operates under “laws” and principles which are objective and “eternally and universally unchanging.”⁶⁹ The first principle or law of the liturgy is that the “prayer of a corporate body must be sustained by thought.” Enriched with dogma, liturgical prayer has the capacity to enlighten the soul. Guardini argues that the *lex orandi* is the *lex credendi*.⁷⁰ In order to avoid a “frigid domination of reason,” the second law of the liturgy asserts that liturgy should be permeated by feeling since “the ideas...spring from the impulses of the heart which has been moulded by grace, and must again in their turn affect other eager and ardent hearts.”⁷¹ Guardini cautions, however, that the quality of emotion in liturgical prayer must also be controlled and restrained. He notes:

If prayer is ultimately to be fruitful and beneficial to a corporate body, it must be intense and profound, but at the same time normally tranquil in tone...It must... clearly express the great fundamental feelings, both natural and spiritual, as do the Psalms, for instance, where we find the utterance of adoration, longing for God, gratitude, supplication, awe, remorse, love, readiness for sacrifice, courage in suffering, faith, confidence...The emotion must not be too acutely penetrating, too tender, or too delicate, but strong, clear, simple and natural.⁷²

It is necessary to ensure a delicate balance of feelings so that the liturgy is free from excessive liturgical pietism and extreme fanaticism, while it acknowledges the place of human affectivity. The third principle ensures that there is a moral code of behavior inherent in the liturgy. Although explicit moral actions are not expressed in the liturgical

⁶⁸ Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 121, n.1.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 121, 124.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 124.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 129-131.

prayers, the liturgy must encourage lofty moral behavior in everyday decisions.⁷³

Guardini argues that the liturgy forms the soul “not by means of deliberate teaching and the exercise of virtue, but by the fact that it exists in the light of eternal Truth, and is naturally and supernaturally robust.”⁷⁴ The form used in common liturgical prayer comprises the fourth law or principle of the liturgy. It must have the capacity to “transform the souls of a great multitude of people.” The assembly should be able to actively participate in its prayers and actions in a progressive rather than repetitive fashion. This movement is dependent upon a leader who organizes the flow of the liturgy and whose interior disposition provides the model for the gathered faithful.⁷⁵ The fifth and final law dictates that the liturgy must embody “two fundamental forces of human existence: nature and civilization.”⁷⁶ Human nature in all of its highs and lows is best expressed in the Old Testament, especially in the Psalms. As Guardini observes, “Human nature is inexplicable, a tangled web of splendour and misery, of greatness and baseness, and as such it appears in the prayer of the Church.”⁷⁷ The liturgy of the Church must also express the cultural heritage of the people. Guardini finds this aspect to be essential to the form and expression of liturgy. He writes:

Religion needs civilization. By civilization we mean the essence of the most valuable products of [humankind’s] creative, constructive, and organizing powers—works of art, science, social orders, and the like. In the liturgy it is civilization’s task to give durable form and expression to the treasure of truths, aims and supernatural activity, which God has delivered to [humankind] by Revelation, to distil its quintessence, and to relate this to life in all its multiplicity.⁷⁸

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 132-133.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 178, n. 1.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 133-136.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 136-137.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

Learning and culture provide a healthy atmosphere for religion and spiritual life to express itself. Given these basic regulations, Guardini concludes that the Church's liturgy is relevant to all times, places and cultures.⁷⁹

Guardini believes that above all, the liturgy is divine service rendered to God. Therefore, one can rightly say that the liturgy cannot be regarded as having a purpose. It is an end in itself, not a means to an end.⁸⁰ He states:

It [the liturgy] does not exist for the sake of humanity, but for the sake of God. In the liturgy [the human person] is no longer concerned with himself[herself]; his[her] gaze is directed towards God. In it [the human person] is not so much intended to edify himself[herself] as to contemplate God's majesty. The liturgy means that the soul exists in God's presence, originates in Him, lives in a world of divine realities, truths, mysteries and symbols, and really lives its true, characteristic and fruitful life.⁸¹

The spiritual realm that the liturgy creates gives the soul the freedom and the vastness of space to "wander about in it at will and to develop itself there."⁸² Like a child at play, with no purpose in mind but earnest, meaningful, simple and joyful play, the soul plays before God "with no other purpose than that of living and existing in His sight."⁸³

Schmemmann recalls the child at play who teaches the beauty and simplicity of true worship. In his farewell sermon, he prayed, "Thank you, O Lord,...for our children, who teach us how to celebrate your Holy Name, in joy, movement and holy noise."⁸⁴

Guardini describes the playful character of liturgy:

The soul must learn to abandon, at least in prayer, the restlessness of purposeful activity; it must learn to waste time for the sake of God, and to be prepared for the sacred game with sayings and thoughts and gestures, without always immediately asking 'why?' and 'wherefore?' It must learn not to be continually yearning to do

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 178.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 177.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 181-183.

⁸⁴ Scorer, "Obituaries," *Alexander Schmemmann* (1921-1983), 68.

something, to attack something, to accomplish something useful, but to play the divinely ordained game of the liturgy in liberty and beauty and holy joy before God.⁸⁵

Guardini introduces the element of surrender to the work of the Holy Spirit whose movement within the human soul creates true worship. This concept is contrary to a utilitarian culture that is overcharged with the pressures of productivity. Krieg posits that believers at liturgy depend on the liturgy to reveal the “deepest truth at the heart of creation, the mystery of the triune God.”⁸⁶ In the same way as the play of a child manifests [his/her] inner soul, so, too, does the worship of the believer reveal his true nature as *homo adorans*. By the grace of the Holy Spirit, the human person becomes “that which according to his[her] divine destiny he[she] should be and longs to be, a child of God,”⁸⁷ [his/her] primary identity.

Most importantly, Guardini believes that the true spirit of the liturgy is discovered by participation in it. He writes, “For the approach to the liturgy is not by being told about it but by taking part in it.”⁸⁸ He posits that the movement of the liturgy is actualized by and through “the whole human person with all his[her] creative powers.”⁸⁹

The liturgy is not a matter of ideas, but of actual things, and of actual things as they now are, not as they were in the past. It is a continuous movement carried on by and through us, and its forms and actions issue from our human nature. To show how it arose and developed brings us no nearer to it, and no more does this or that learned interpretation. What does help is to discern the soul from the body, the hidden and spiritual from the external and material. The liturgy has taken its outward shape from a divine and hidden series of happenings. It is sacramental in nature.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 183-184.

⁸⁶ Krieg, 77.

⁸⁷ Guardini, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, 180-181.

⁸⁸ Romano Guardini, *Sacred Signs* (St. Louis: Pio Decimo Press, 1956), 12.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 9, 12.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

To ensure a more active participation in the liturgy, Guardini wrote *Sacred Signs*, a basic liturgical catechesis intended to form the faithful in a true spirit of worship. This simple but profound text opens up the world of liturgical symbolism and gives new meaning to the actions and objects used in the liturgy. His understanding of the sign of the Cross, the steps of the altar, and the bread and wine, call to mind the ‘ascent’ to the Kingdom of God as described by Schmemmann. Although in Schmemmann’s thought, the signing with the Cross is a confession of the eschatological nature of the Divine Liturgy, Guardini points to the sanctifying nature of the Cross in the economy of humankind’s salvation. He writes:

When we cross ourselves, let it be with the real sign of the cross. Instead of a small cramped gesture that gives no notion of its meaning, let us make a large unhurried sign, from forehead to breast, from shoulder to shoulder, consciously feeling how it includes the whole of us, our thoughts, our attitudes, our body and soul, every part of us at once, how it consecrates and sanctifies us.

It does so because it is the sign of the universe and the sign of our redemption. On the cross Christ redeemed [humankind]. By the cross He sanctifies [humankind] to the last shred and fibre of his[her] being. We make the sign of the cross before we pray to collect and compose ourselves and to fix our minds and hearts and wills upon God. We make it when we finish praying in order that we may hold fast the gift we have received from God. In temptations we sign ourselves to be strengthened; in dangers, to be protected. The cross is signed upon us in blessings in order that the fullness of God’s life may flow into the soul and fructify and sanctify us wholly.

Think of these things when you make the sign of the cross. It is the holiest of signs. Make a large cross, taking time, thinking what you do. Let it take in your whole being,--body, soul, mind, will, thoughts, feelings, your doing and not-doing,--and by signing it with the cross strengthen and consecrate the whole in the strength of Christ, in the name of the triune God.⁹¹

Guardini’s reflections on the sanctifying nature of the Cross are a powerful example of what is meant by the need to reinstate a sense of liturgical consciousness into the faithful. This simple gesture, when accomplished with prayerful consideration, reflects the true spirit of worship. Guardini’s explanation of the steps of the altar parallels Schmemmann’s

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

thought. Guardini claims that in the motion of ascending the altar steps, a great mystery is revealed. With each ascent of the stairs, a transformation takes place in the whole person who climbs. He notes, “All ascension, all going up, if we will but give it thought, is motion in the direction of that high place where everything is great, everything made perfect.”⁹² Guardini submits that the steps are the entrance into the the presence of God and those who walk them stand on holy ground. Above all, they serve to remind Christians that with each ascent, it is the Lord’s Ascension.⁹³ Lastly, the bread and wine make the union of the faithful with God possible. Guardini describes this union as “that of life and being,” one that is “not by any mingling or confusion of natures, for creature and creator are forever distinct.”⁹⁴ Human hunger and thirst represent a deeper hunger and thirst that the human person has for God. This desire, implanted by God, is satisfied “to the full” by the flesh and blood of Christ given to humankind “under the form of bread” as “the food of life.”⁹⁵

Bread is food. It is wholesome, nourishing food for which we never lose our appetite... ‘We break a bread,’ writes Saint Ignatius of Antioch to the faithful at Ephesus, ‘we break a bread that is the food of immortality.’ By this food our being is so nourished with God himself that we exist in him and he in us...For our sakes Christ became bread and wine, food and drink. We make bold to eat him and to drink him.⁹⁶

Sharing in the divine life of Christ in the Eucharistic bread and wine, the food and drink of immortality, unites the believer to God and satisfies the deepest longing of the human spirit. The true spirit of the liturgy is discovered in “the breaking of the bread” (Lk 24: 35) when Christ reveals His divinity and invites believers to share in divine plenitude.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 34.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 66-67.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 67-68.

Guardini truly paved the way for the liturgical renewal to move from the confines of the cloister in the Benedictine monasteries to the people in the parishes. His pastoral leadership in youth ministry enabled young men and women to experience the Eucharistic celebrations in more meaningful ways. Guardini translated parts of the Mass into German and encouraged the assembly to sing hymns in the vernacular. He renovated the chapel space so that the altar was moveable and he could face the congregation gathered around him. He introduced the offertory procession and made significant changes to the celebration of the Triduum services. Scriptural texts for Holy Saturday were read in German and the Easter Vigil was celebrated on Saturday evening instead of Saturday at dawn. The congregation walked in a candlelight procession behind the Easter candle.⁹⁷ Kuehn describes Guardini's charismatic manner of celebrating the liturgy:

If I wanted to explain in a few words what irresistibly drew me and the small congregation that came from all parts of Berlin to Guardini's Mass, it was simply this: He was a person who by his words and actions drew us into a world where the sacred became convincingly and literally tangible. His mere appearance radiated something for which I have no better word than numinous; in his presence one fell silent and became all attention. With him at the altar, the sacred table became the center of the universe.⁹⁸

Guardini is not only credited with keeping the Church alive in the midst of Nazi tyranny, but more poignantly, he had a gift of making his congregation "see the world from the perspective of divine revelation" so that this vision could be transformed into a lived reality.⁹⁹ In his understanding, authentic worship must form Christian life.

⁹⁷ Frederic Debuyst, "The Church: A Dwelling Place of Faith," *Studia Liturgica* 24 (1994), 30-31; quoted in Krieg, *Romano Guardini: A Precursor of Vatican II*, 80-81.

⁹⁸ Heinz R. Kuehn, "Fires in the Night: Germany 1920-1950," *Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*, ed., Robert A. Krieg, CSC (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 6.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

Guardini realized that the shift in the Church to renew her liturgical life was indicative of a far greater need, i.e., one of ecclesial renewal.¹⁰⁰ Like Schmemmann, Guardini was grounded in the centrality of Eucharistic worship as the identity of the Church. In and through this public act of service rendered to God for His glory, the Church “eternally actualizes” her nature as Christ’s Body.¹⁰¹ As Schilson notes, “it is the place where Christ still lives and acts in the world.”¹⁰² Guardini realized the intrinsic connection between the movement to revive liturgical life in the Church and an ecclesial renewal to rise at its heels. He introduces his text, *The Church and the Catholic*, with a somewhat prophetic announcement: “A religious process of incalculable importance has begun—the Church is coming to life in the souls of men [and women].”¹⁰³ For those who make the Church their very life, Guardini claims that the Church is “the Kingdom of God” alive in them.¹⁰⁴ He adds:

The Kingdom of God—it is the epitome of Christianity. All that Christ was, all that He taught, did, created, and suffered, is contained in these words—He has established the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom of God means that the Creator takes possession of His creature, penetrates it with His light; He fills its will and heart with His own burning love and the root of its being with His own divine peace, and He moulds the entire spirit by the creative power which imposes a new form upon it. The Kingdom of God means that God draws His creature to Himself, and makes it capable of receiving His own fullness; and that He bestows upon it the longing and the power to possess Him. It means—alas, the words are blunted by repetition and our hearts are so dull, or they would catch fire at the thought!—that the boundless fecundity of the divine Love seizes the creature and brings it to that second birth whereby it shares God’s own nature and lives with a new life which springs from Himself. In that rebirth the Father makes it His child in Christ Jesus through the Holy Ghost.

¹⁰⁰ Arno Schilson, “The Major Theological Themes of Romano Guardini,” *Romano Guardini: Proclaiming the Sacred in a Modern World*, ed., Robert A. Krieg, CSC, (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1995), 38.

¹⁰¹ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 14.

¹⁰² Schilson, 38.

¹⁰³ Romano Guardini, *The Church and the Catholic* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1935), 11.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 33.

The union of [humankind] with God is God's Kingdom. In it man[and woman] belong to his[her] Creator, and his[her] Creator belongs to Him.¹⁰⁵

Guardini posits the Church as the Kingdom of God, the presence of the glory of God dwelling in the hearts of those who belong to her. He believes that the "primary and deepest meaning" of the Church is revealed in her nature as the presence of the Kingdom of God.¹⁰⁶ In this light, Guardini posits a rebirth of humankind who participates in divine nature and shares in a new life. Guardini calls it the "elevation of the creature" that comes about by a free act of God's grace and is linked to the work of the "historical personality of Jesus of Nazareth."¹⁰⁷ He adds that in the liturgy, the human person discovers what it means to be fully human as [he/she] stands before the presence of God in prayer and adoration. Realizing [his/her] nature as a finite creature, the human person has begun the "ascent to the Divine."¹⁰⁸ Guardini's language is interwoven with *theosis*:

[The human person] faces and acknowledges his[her] own essential limitation. But at the same time he[she] sees that he[she] can attach his[her] finite life at every point to God's Infinite Life, and fill it with an unlimited content. [The human person] there finds rest. He[she] rejoices in the fact that he[she] is a creature, and still more that he[she] is called to be a 'partaker of the Divine Nature.'¹⁰⁹

Guardini holds fast to the truth that the liturgy of the Church reveals the truth about God and humankind and offers the means for union with God through "prayer, sacrifice and sacraments."¹¹⁰ Liturgical renewal clearly mandates an ecclesial inquiry.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 32.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 65.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 66.

Yves Congar: “The Father of Roman Catholic Ecumenism”¹¹¹

At the center of Congar’s vision for a renewed ecclesiology is his concern for unity among a divided Christendom. Congar attributes his passion for the cause of Christian unity to what he believes to be his personal vocation. In 1930, while making a retreat in preparation for his priestly ordination to the Order of Preachers, Congar discerned this call: “It was whilst meditating on Chapter 17 of St. John that I perceived a definitive call to labour in order that all who believe in Jesus Christ might be one.”¹¹² Jossua submits that this “charism”¹¹³ is key to appreciating Congar’s theological contributions to the Church of the twentieth century. He notes:

For from the very moment he chose to orient his life and work towards Unity, and while his masters and friends feared that he was locking himself inside too narrow a specialization, he had grasped that ecumenism is not a specialty or a theme of study, but veritably an ‘all embracing dimension within the Church.’¹¹⁴

Congar later recalled, “I had at that time become conscious of an ecumenical vocation, which was in the same dynamic as an ecclesiological vocation.”¹¹⁵

As a young Dominican, Congar was acutely aware that the question of Christian unity could only be resolved by a “profound reform of the Church.”¹¹⁶ Such a reform mandated an honest scrutiny from within that would ultimately manifest the true identity of the Church. Congar writes,

¹¹¹ W.A. Visser’t Hooft, *Memoirs* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), 319; quoted in Gabriel Flynn, *Yves Congar’s Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief* (Burlington: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2004), 139.

¹¹² Jean-Pierre Jossua, O.P., “In Hope of Unity,” *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, ed., Gabriel Flynn, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2005), 168.

¹¹³ Understood theologically, “charism” is “the gift of the Spirit made to a Christian with a view to the service of his[her] brethren” as noted in Jossua, “In Hope of Unity,” 168.

¹¹⁴ Jossua, 169.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 170.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

My God, who helped me to understand as early as 1929-30 that if the Church were to change her face, or rather if she simply put on her true face, if she were simply to be the Church, then everything would become possible on the road to unity [...]¹¹⁷

Congar's approach to Church reform, according to Flynn, is "his most important and original contribution to Christian theology."¹¹⁸ It is an approach that is based on his love of the Church and his trust in the Truth that the Church reveals. Church reform, in his view, is not to be an enterprise of negativity, nor must it be injurious to Church unity. Rather, true reform must be faithful to tradition while being open to change, especially as it affects the mission of the Church in the future. Therefore, he proposes a reform that begins with a biblical and patristic foundation.¹¹⁹ In 1937, Congar wrote:

Everywhere we get a sense that it would be of great profit in our pastoral ministry and would allow Christianity to spread to a far greater extent throughout the world, if the concept of Church were to recover the broad, rich, vital meaning it once had, a meaning deriving wholly from the Bible and Tradition.¹²⁰

Returning to the sources, in Congar's view, meant to return to Jesus Christ and the Paschal Mystery. Flynn argues that Congar's role as a reformer could not be separated from his role as a theologian who loved the Church, and "as a servant of evangelical truth."¹²¹ Consequently, Congar was deeply aware that the existing "juridical" concept of the Church, inherited from the post-Tridentine era, could only be challenged by a general

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹¹⁸ Gabriel Flynn, "Yves Congar and Catholic Church Reform: A Renewal of the Spirit," *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, ed., Gabriel Flynn, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2005), 100.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 105-111.

¹²⁰ Yves Congar, "Pour une théologie de l'Église," *La Vie Spirituelle*, 52 (1937), 97-99; quoted in Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 18.

¹²¹ Flynn, "Yves Congar and Catholic Church Reform," 106.

Council to be held in Rome.¹²² Congar's vision of the Church transcended the image of the Church as a juridical institution and embraced an ecclesiology of communion.

Jossua observes, "From the 1930's onwards, he (Congar) believed that if one wanted to be active in ecumenism, it was the state and concept of the Church that needed to be tackled..."¹²³ Congar was convinced that internal Church reform and the unity of Christians were not isolated areas of study, but were undeniably intertwined. He proffered the need for a conversion of heart attained by prayer inspired action:

When it is a matter of the renewal of the Church and the conversion of heart, prayer for unity, especially when made in common, and when it attains a certain level of sincerity and depth—as it is generally the case—makes us aware of the exigencies of Jesus Christ, and the indifference of the rest. It invites us to go inside ourselves and not to harden our hearts.¹²⁴

Elsewhere, he writes:

It is a way of conversion. It asks not less faith, but more, [...] Ecumenism demands a profound moral and even religious conversion. [...] Ecumenism seeks also a reform within ourselves, for we are full of aggressiveness, clannishness and arrogance, of distrust and rivalry. We must be converted by detachment from all this and from ourselves, and acceptance of a humble submissiveness of what the Lord expects of us.¹²⁵

Flynn concurs with Congar, stating that ecumenism is a "moral imperative" that must no longer be regarded as an option for Christians. He submits that the moral implications for ecumenism extend beyond "the Church and its unity" to "the world and its salvation."¹²⁶

Therefore, Christians must realize their moral obligation to heed Christ's call to unity and

¹²² *Ibid.*, 102.

¹²³ Jossua, "In Hope of Unity," 170.

¹²⁴ Yves Congar, *This Church That I Love*, 115, 121; quoted in Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 23.

¹²⁵ Yves Congar, "Ecumenical Experience and Conversion: A Personal Testimony," *The Sufficiency of God*, ed. Robert C. Mackie and Charles C. West (London: SCM, 1963) 83-84; quoted in Gabriel Flynn, "An 'Ecumenical Ethics' For Reconciliation," *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, ed., Gabriel Flynn, (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2005), 212.

¹²⁶ Flynn, "An 'Ecumenical Ethics' For Reconciliation," 214.

to work unceasingly to promote the peace and fraternal charity that leads to reconciliation. True ecumenism begins with a renewed ecclesiology.

Congar's commitment to ecumenism was grounded in his belief that the future of the Church and her mission of evangelization were at stake.¹²⁷ In fact, he observes an intrinsic link between the divisions among Christians and the upsurge of unbelief:

Historically, the divisions among Christians, the fiercely cruel wars, carried out in the name of dogmatic differences, are largely responsible for the genesis of modern unbelief (Herbert of Cherbury, Spinoza, the *Philosophes* of the eighteenth century). Concretely, the division among Christians is a scandal for the world. The world is exonerated, to a degree, from the duty to believe.¹²⁸

Congar boldly acknowledges the culpability of the Church for unbelief. He insists that the "juridical" understanding of Church must be changed. In *Chrétiens en dialogue* in 1964, Congar reiterates his conclusions from an article that he wrote in 1935 in *La Vie intellectuelle*:¹²⁹

To some extent, however, we are to blame for unbelief, and this seemed to me to arise from the fact that the Church shows to [humankind] a face which belies rather than expresses her true nature, which conforms to the Gospel and her own profound tradition. The real response would be a renewal of our own view of the Church and above all, in order to achieve this, a renewal of our own view of the Church transcending the juridical idea of her which has been dominant for so long.¹³⁰

During those years, however, Congar realized the need for theology to dialogue with anthropology to discover the "connection between faith in God and the prospect of his reign on one hand, and [humanity] and terrestrial creation on the other."¹³¹ This approach,

¹²⁷ Yves Congar, "The Council in the Age of Dialogue," *Cross Currents*, 12 (1962), 146-148; quoted in Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 140.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 148; quoted in Flynn, 215.

¹²⁹ Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 75.

¹³⁰ Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism*, 23; quoted in Flynn, 75.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

in his view, would formulate an ecclesiology that stresses the relationship between the divine and the human and the Church and the world.¹³²

Flynn posits that Congar's ecclesial and ecumenical vision offers promising implications for a theology of worship.¹³³ Liturgist and ecumenist, Bruno Bürki, a Reformed Protestant, observes that any true investigation into the nature of the Church dictates a scrutiny of her liturgical life.¹³⁴ He adds that Congar was suspicious of the work of promoters of church reform and liturgical renewal after the Second Vatican Council. In Congar's view, the need for reform often resulted in change that was isolated from the liturgical sense of the early Church.¹³⁵ As Bürki notes,¹³⁶ Congar describes this oversight in the Introduction to the text, *La Liturgie Après Vatican II*:

Cette question de la nature originale du culte Chrétien domine toutes les autres. Elle conditionne celle du sacerdoce évangélique, celle du rapport entre liturgie et vie terrestre quotidienne. La Constitution conciliaire la suppose résolue plus qu'elle ne l'aborde. Mais les liturgistes, dans l'ensemble, ne l'ont pas traitée davantage. Ils s'intéressent aux formes liturgiques et à leur mise en œuvre, à les ramener le plus possible à l'authenticité de leur origine ou de leur signification particulière, ils ne se sont guère interrogés sur le point de savoir si ces formes, même considérées en leur authenticité originelle, traduisent exactement l'idée évangélique ou néotestamentaire du culte Chrétien...¹³⁷

(This question of the original nature of Christian cult dominates all others. It conditions that of evangelical priesthood, that of the relationship between the liturgy and everyday

¹³² Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 75-76.

¹³³ Yves Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Contributions to Ecumenism*, trans., Philip Loretz (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 21; quoted in Flynn, "An 'Ecumenical Ethics' For Reconciliation," 215-216.

¹³⁴ Bruno Bürki, "The Church's Sacramental Celebration of the Easter Mystery: Yves M.J. Congar and Ecumenical Liturgical Perspectives," *Yves Congar: Theologian of the Church*, ed., Gabriel Flynn (Louvain: Peeters Press, 2005), 186.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁷ Yves Congar, *Unam Sanctam: La Liturgie Après Vatican II*, ed., Yves Congar et al., no. 66 (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1967), 15.

life. The conciliar documents imply that the question is resolved more than it is. But liturgists, on the whole, don't treat it anymore. They are concerned with liturgical form and preparation to lead them as much as possible to the authenticity of their roots and particular meanings, they hardly questioned the fact of knowing if the forms, even considered in their original authenticity, truly express the Gospel or New Testament notion of Christian cult.) Liturgical renewal must emerge from an ecclesiology that is faithful to the tradition of the Church of the first Christians while it manifests the "Paschal Mystery of Christ."¹³⁸ Congar's ecclesial reflections offer sound theological grounds for the development of a theology of the liturgy that is true to its nature and purpose. He observed that Guardini, Beauduin and other pioneers of the liturgical movement were keenly aware that liturgical renewal was best accomplished from a theological stance rooted in sound ecclesiology.¹³⁹ Its horizons were far broader than mere external and ritualistic changes that have no meaning in the daily life of Christian believers. Authentic Church renewal is a revival of the communion ecclesiology of the early Church and a return to the evangelical mission of each Christian. Such renewal mandates a revival of true spirit of the early Church who gathered on the Lord's Day to celebrate the Eucharist as a community of believers charged with the salvation of all humankind.

Congar and the Orthodox

Congar was attracted to the spirit of Orthodoxy. In his early days as a Dominican, Congar frequented the Russian seminary at Lille that was operated by the Order of

¹³⁸ Bürki, 186-187.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*,

Preachers.¹⁴⁰ In Paris, he was introduced to Orthodox thought by Russian *émigrés* from the Institute of Saint Sergius.¹⁴¹ Among the theology faculty, Congar had regular meetings with Georges Florovsky and Serge Boulgakov.¹⁴² The vision of the Russian theologians and the Orthodox Church was a striking contrast to Roman Catholicism. Congar was particularly fond of the spirituality of Orthodox monasticism with its emphasis on the “cosmic dimension of the paschal message.”¹⁴³ He was impressed by the role that symbolism played in Orthodox liturgy, noting that it was a refreshing change from the “Latin-rite conceptualism.”¹⁴⁴ Congar was enlightened by the eschatological character of Orthodoxy that is always cognizant of the Kingdom of God. In addition, Jossua believes that Congar was drawn toward Orthodoxy because of the emphasis on the Holy Spirit, which was underdeveloped at that time in Western theology and spirituality.¹⁴⁵ With his interest in ecclesiology and ecumenism, pneumatology was crucial for him. Congar absorbed the spirit of Orthodoxy through dialogue, personal encounters, and prayer with his Orthodox brothers. He personifies his own vision of the Church as communion ecclesiology based on fraternal charity and a true sense of mission.

Congar’s ecumenical and ecclesial interests made a favorable impression on the Orthodox community. In 2002, Boris Bobrinsky, Dean of St. Sergius, noted in a tribute to Congar:

¹⁴⁰ Jossua, 167-168.

¹⁴¹ Timothy I. MacDonald, *The Ecclesiology of Yves Congar: Foundational Themes* (New York: University Press of America, 1984), 30.

¹⁴² Flynn, “An ‘Ecumenical Ethics’ For Reconciliation,” 209.

¹⁴³ Jossua, “In Hope of Unity,” 177.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 176.

Father Congar has permanently marked this century [i.e., the twentieth century] and has inspired a theological and spiritual fermentation around the mystery of the one Church and of the division of Christians. I can say that the Orthodox theological renewal owes much to him and likewise the liturgical renewal of Solesmes or Maria-Laach, or the patristic renewal at “Sources chrétiennes.”¹⁴⁶

Schmemmann, so prominent in Orthodox renewal, also respected Congar’s contribution to twentieth century theology. He praised Congar’s observation that a true ecclesial identity was missing and “almost completely absent” in “post-patristic theology.”¹⁴⁷ The nature of the Church as divine and human, and her presence as the Body of Christ must be retrieved, especially for the profound implications they hold for renewing “liturgical consciousness.”¹⁴⁸ As Schmemmann notes, ecclesial reform mandates a theological inquiry into the tradition of the Church’s liturgy since worship is the very “life of the Church.”¹⁴⁹ Congar’s interest and subsequent development of ecclesial reform in the West was invaluable to Schmemmann and other Orthodox theologians. The revival of Church doctrine launched a theological investigation into the liturgical tradition that would later be defined and developed by Schmemmann as “liturgical theology.”¹⁵⁰

Congar was part of a wider theological community from the West whose presence in Paris in the 1930’s and 1940’s contributed to the liturgical, ecclesial and patristic renewal of the Western Church. Two prominent Western theologians, Jean Daniélou and Louis Bouyer, were among them. They were to exert a powerful influence on the young

¹⁴⁶ Boris Bobrinsky, “Le P. Yves Congar et l’orthodoxie,” *Istina* 48 (2003), 20-23; quoted in Flynn, “An ‘Ecumenical Ethics’ For Reconciliation,” 209-210.

¹⁴⁷ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 13.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

¹⁵⁰ Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” 1.

Orthodox seminarian and theologian, Alexander Schmemmann.¹⁵¹ John Meyendorff writes about their impact on Schmemmann and his work:

It is quite clear that Fr. Alexander's theological worldview was shaped during his Paris years. But, although the influence of some of his teachers at St. Sergius was decisive, he always lived in a wider spiritual world. The forties and fifties were a period of extraordinary theological revival in French Roman Catholicism—the years of a 'return to the sources' and a 'liturgical movement.' It is from that existing milieu that Fr. Schmemmann really learned 'liturgical theology,' a 'philosophy of time' and the true meaning of the 'paschal mystery.' The names and ideas of Jean Daniélou, Louis Bouyer, and several others are inseparable from the shaping of Fr. Schmemmann's mind. And if their legacy was somewhat lost within the turmoil of postconciliar Roman Catholicism, their ideas produced much fruit in the organically-liturgical and ecclesiology-consistent world of Orthodoxy through the brilliant and always effective witness of Fr. Schmemmann.¹⁵²

Both Church traditions owe much to the Parisian theological community of the 1930's and 1940's. If nothing else, they personify the spirit of ecumenism as defined by Congar: "Ecumenism is seen as a discovery of another spiritual world which 'does not uproot us from our own, but changes the way we look at many things.'"¹⁵³ They also hold out hope and promise that a unified Church is a viable vision.

Jean Daniélou: Symbolism and Secularism

Ecclesial reform was enhanced by the work of another French theologian in the mid-twentieth century, Jesuit Fr. Jean Daniélou. This section will highlight two areas of his work that were glaringly authoritative in Schmemmann's theological formation: sacramental symbolism and secularism. Like his Parisian confrères, Daniélou recognized

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵² John Meyendorff, "A Life Worth Living," *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1990), 148-149.

¹⁵³ Yves Congar, "Ecumenical Experience and Conversion: A Personal Testimony," *The Sufficiency of God*, ed. Robert C. Mackie and Charles C. West (London: SCM, 1963), 71-87; quoted in Flynn, *Yves Congar's Vision of the Church in a World of Unbelief*, 142.

the need for the Church to redirect humanity back to God to meet the challenges posed by the modern world of the twentieth century.

Sacramental Symbolism

Daniélou argues that Christians fail to understand the meaning of sacramental rites and symbols. As a result, worship loses its effectiveness in their lives as they fail to make the connection between the liturgy and Christian living. To this end, Daniélou posits the need to rediscover the patristic teaching regarding the symbolism of worship in the early Church. He notes that this journey leads to the age of the apostles and the biblical richness of their liturgical tradition.¹⁵⁴ In the preface to Daniélou's text, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Mathis observes that the sacramental rites and the feasts of the liturgical year were intended to be the primary source of catechesis for Christians. They were the means by which Christians were formed in the Christian way of life that stemmed from worship. He observes:

During the last centuries, however, the faithful have too seldom taken proper advantage of this primal source of Christian initiation and growth. The reason is that they have lost familiarity both with the scriptural types and figures required for doing so and with the significance given to these types and figures by Christ Himself, by the Apostles, and by the Fathers.¹⁵⁵

Thus, Daniélou seeks to “recover” the “biblical theology” that constituted the sacramental theology of the Fathers of the early Church¹⁵⁶ so that the meaning of the sacramental rites of the Church will once again inform authentic Christian living.

¹⁵⁴ Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, Publications of the University of Notre Dame Liturgical Studies, ed. Michael A. Mathis, CSC, vol. III (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1956), 3-4.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

Biblical theology is permeated with typology.¹⁵⁷ Old Testament “events, persons and things” serve as “prototypes” that foreshadow the “events, persons and things” of the New Testament.¹⁵⁸ Daniélou describes three categories of typology in biblical theology: eschatological, Christological and sacramental. The prophets of the Old Testament announced to the people of Israel that God would perform deeds that would be even greater than He had done in the past. “A new Deluge...a new Exodus...a new Paradise”¹⁵⁹ are examples of eschatological typologies that constitute their prophecy. Christ, the New Adam, who fulfills the events of the Old Testament and begins the “Paradise of the future,”¹⁶⁰ typifies Christological typology. Sacramental typology can be found in both the New and the Old Testaments. The Red Sea crossing and the Flood have been interpreted as figures of Baptism. St. John’s Gospel reveals that the manna in Exodus was a foreshadowing of the Eucharist.¹⁶¹ Each of these categorizations of typology contributes to the biblical symbolism that forms the basis of sacramental understanding. In addition, they demonstrate the richness inherent in sacramental signs and symbols.

Sacramental typology reveals two dimensions of reality. First, the sacraments manifest God’s works in both Testaments as already accomplished. Secondly, they present themselves in the visible signs of water, bread, wine, oil, etc. as the means whereby God’s action continues to operate in the present. Daniélou proffers the need to

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹⁵⁸ *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “typology,” by Gerald O’Collins, S.J. and Edward G. Farrugia, S.J.

¹⁵⁹ Daniélou, 5.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

examine the symbolism of Judaic liturgy in view of the significance it held for the Jews and Christ Himself. Jewish mentality, he notes, was formed by the Old Testament:

It is in studying the significance for the Old Testament of the different elements used in the sacraments that we have the best method of discovering their significance for Christ and for the Apostles. We shall possess a typology that will bear not only on the content of the sacraments, but also their form; and this typology will show us that we are quite justified in seeing the sacraments as prefigured in the Old Testament, since it is for this reason that these particular signs were chosen by Christ.¹⁶²

Daniélou notes that observance of this method demonstrates the significance of Christ's deeds, which were "charged with biblical memories."¹⁶³ It also confirms the origins of sacramental symbolism and ensures authentic liturgical praxis.

The Church sustains an invaluable inheritance in the sacramental theology of the early Fathers. Based on the Scriptures and apostolic tradition, their writings, homilies and catecheses provide a dogmatic and biblical foundation for the sacraments and explain the symbolism of the rites. In the mystagogic catecheses, the Fathers preserve the character of mystery about the sacraments by offering instruction to the catechumens in light of their sacramental initiation.¹⁶⁴ Clearly, as Christians were prepared for reception into the Church, they understood the centrality of worship in their new identity as members of the Body of Christ. Daniélou notes:

For the fact is that the life of ancient Christianity was centered around worship. And worship was not considered to be a collection of rites meant to sanctify secular life. The sacraments were thought of as the essential events of Christian existence, and of existence itself, as being the prolongation of the great works of God in the Old Testament and the New. In them was inaugurated a new creation which introduced the Christian even now into the Kingdom of God.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 8-11.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 17.

The witness of the Fathers to the tradition of the Apostles and the early Church has generated a biblical theology of the sacraments that attests to the nature and meaning of the sacramental life of the Church. Clearly, they remained faithful to Revelation, Tradition and the eschatological vision of the Church.

Eucharistic Rites, Symbolism and Biblical Figures

Based on the Eucharistic catechesis given to the newly baptized in the early Church, Daniélou describes the rites, symbolism and biblical figures of the Eucharistic liturgy. His work is framed within the context of the Easter vigil and the celebration of Christian initiation. Daniélou submits that throughout the Eucharistic liturgy, one observes the recurrence of two principal themes: “the Mass is a sacramental representation of the sacrifice of the Cross, the Mass is a sacramental participation in the heavenly liturgy.”¹⁶⁶ These themes are apparent at the beginning of the Eucharistic celebration when the procession of the newly baptized enters the sanctuary from the Baptistry. St. Ambrose records that the neophytes are reciting, “I will go in to the altar of God, to God who rejoices my youth.” (Ps 43:4)¹⁶⁷ Daniélou observes the immediate introduction of the theme of the “*heavenly banquet*,” and notes that St. Gregory of Nazianzen also sees in this procession the symbolism of entrance into the sanctuary of heaven.¹⁶⁸

In Gregory’s vision, the paschal night opens out into eternity. The baptized have already entered into it. The boundaries between the earthly world and the heavenly have been done away with. The baptized already mingle with the angels. They are about to take part in the liturgy of heaven.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 127-128.

¹⁶⁷ B. Botte, ed., *Sources chrétiennes, De Sacramentis*, 43, by Saint Ambrose (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1949), 121; quoted in Daniélou, 129.

¹⁶⁸ Daniélou, 129.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 129-130.

Unmistakably, the Fathers regard the celebration of the Eucharistic mysteries to be the participation of the gathered faithful in the banquet of the Kingdom of heaven. It is noteworthy that the Byzantine liturgy has preserved the transparency of the eschatological nature of the liturgy and the spirit of the Fathers in their worship.

The second part of the liturgy, the preparation, according to Daniélou, begins when the newly baptized are permitted to see the altar.¹⁷⁰ Ambrose writes, “You have come to the altar, you have seen that which you had not yet seen, you have begun to see the light of the sacraments.”¹⁷¹ The altar is a figure of Christ and is symbolic of the perpetual self-offering He makes to the Father in heaven. According to Daniélou, this demonstrates the theme of the sacrificial nature of the Eucharistic liturgy.¹⁷² The deacons, also assembled on the altar with the priest, add to the sacrificial theme as they represent the angels in the heavenly liturgy who constantly adore God.¹⁷³ The rites of the washing of the hands and the kiss of peace follow the preparation of the gifts. According to Daniélou, all the catecheses include commentaries about these liturgical actions. For Cyril of Jerusalem, the washing of hands symbolizes the purity and worthiness of disposition necessary for the ministers. Cyril claims that the kiss of peace is the outward sign of the unity of souls that the assembly must have with one another.¹⁷⁴ These rites conclude the preparation rite.

The anaphoral prayer begins the Canon of the liturgy. It is an invitation to raise one’s heart and mind to God alone in holy fear. Daniélou notes that the anaphora calls

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 130.

¹⁷¹ Saint Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* III, 15; Botte, 77; quoted in Daniélou, 130.

¹⁷² Daniélou, 131.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

the faithful to transcend this world and to be filled with the “disposition of the angels in the heavenly liturgy.”¹⁷⁵ He continues, “Holy fear is the feeling which takes possession of [human] hearts when the living God manifest His presence.”¹⁷⁶ The anaphoral prayer serves to remind the faithful that the Eucharistic liturgy is a participation in the liturgy of heaven.¹⁷⁷ The Trisagion which follows, is the seraphic hymn that draws the faithful into the heavenly hymn of praise, “Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord, the God of Hosts. Heaven and earth are full of your glory. Hosanna in the highest.”¹⁷⁸ The central rite of the Eucharist begins with the calling of the Holy Spirit, the *epiclesis*. Daniélou submits that Cyril of Jerusalem (315-386) and Theodore of Mopsuestia (350-428) indicate that the consecration is linked to the *epiclesis* and the descent of the Holy Spirit. St. Ambrose (339-337), on the other hand, attributes the consecration to Christ’s action articulated in the words of institution. Daniélou comments on these differing approaches:¹⁷⁹

So, on the one hand, the consecration, a work common to the Three Persons, is appropriated to the Spirit, by Whom God carried out His great works in history; and, on the other hand, it is attributed to the creative Word, which is also the instrument of the power of God.¹⁸⁰

It is noteworthy that Daniélou remains committed to presenting the authentic interpretations of eastern and western Fathers and does not engage in the “centuries-old dispute”¹⁸¹ over the moment of consecration. He does, however, confirm the economy of the Trinity in the consecration of the Eucharistic elements.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁸ Trisagion, *The Divine Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom*, 72.

¹⁷⁹ Daniélou, 136.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁸¹ Schmemann, *The Eucharist*, 214.

While the Eastern tradition regards the *epiclesis* and the role of the Holy Spirit as essential in changing the elements of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, Western teaching focuses on the words of Christ as the moment of consecration. This dichotomy of approaches to the Eucharistic consecration troubled Schmemmann who cautions against the dangers of isolating moments within the liturgy. Schmemmann believes in the “multifaceted nature of the liturgy.”¹⁸² He argues:

Does what was said about the multifaceted nature of the liturgy not mean that the change of the gifts into the body and blood of Christ happens gradually, step by step, so that it is ultimately unclear precisely when it is accomplished? The question itself, consciously or unconsciously, determines the doctrine of consecration, i.e., of a consecratory formula, of how and when the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.¹⁸³

Schmemmann faults scholastic theology and the loss of the “eschatological dimension” of the Eucharistic liturgy, which, he argues, raises the “*question of time*.”¹⁸⁴ Time belongs to this world. However, the Holy Spirit brought *new time* to the Church at Pentecost, making all things new and transparent to God and his glory.¹⁸⁵ Schmemmann says of the liturgy:

The liturgy is served on earth, and this means in the time and space of ‘this world.’ But if it is served on earth, it is accomplished in heaven, in the new time of the new creation, in the time of the Holy Spirit....For the essence of the liturgy consists in raising us up in the Holy Spirit and in him transfiguring the old time into the new time.¹⁸⁶

Schmemmann’s eschatological vision of the Eucharist accounts for the theology of ascent that is interwoven in his teaching. He insists that the Church ascends into the heavenly mystery that has already been “accomplished” and “given” in Christ.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² *Ibid.*

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

Daniélou submits that Christ's sacrifice is "rendered present on the altar."¹⁸⁸ By sacrifice, he includes Christ's Passion, Resurrection and Ascension that is commemorated in the *anamnesis*. This prayer makes Christ's sacrifice truly present sacramentally.

Daniélou notes the three modes of subsistence of Christ's sacrifice: 1) Christ's sacrifice in a moment in history; 2) Christ's sacrifice as "eternally present in heaven;" and 3) Christ's sacrifice present sacramentally. Through the sacrament, the sacrifice of Christ, accomplished in time, is made present throughout all of time while eternally present in heaven.¹⁸⁹

The Communion rite concludes the liturgy. It is preceded by the rite of infraction, or the breaking of the bread. Daniélou notes that Theodore of Mopsuestia and Pseudo-Dionysius linked this rite with Christ's sharing of Himself "without division of His unity" to all.¹⁹⁰ In the rite of Communion, the faithful share the Eucharistic bread and wine as a participation in the heavenly banquet. Daniélou also notes the importance of the Eucharist as a participation in the Paschal Mystery, which, he states, is made present for all peoples and all times through the sacraments of the Church.¹⁹¹ The Communion rite, then, manifests the eschatological and sacrificial nature of the Eucharist, the essence of the liturgy as symbolized in the sacramental rites.¹⁹²

The Biblical Figures of the Eucharistic Liturgy

The significance of the use of biblical images in the sacraments rests on their capacity to fuse together the Old and New Testament witness of God's deeds for humanity with

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁸⁸ Daniélou, 136.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 137-138.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 138-139.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 139-140.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 141.

sacramental celebration. The Old Testament is a foreshadowing of the New Testament that prefigures the sacraments. Daniélou concludes from this that the “priestly actions” of the Old and the New Testaments are continued in every era through the Eucharistic liturgy. They are developed around two essential rites of the Eucharistic liturgy: the offering of the bread and wine, and the eating of the bread and wine.¹⁹³ Daniélou identifies the sacrifice of Melchisedech as a figure of the offering of bread and wine in the Eucharistic liturgy. The manna in the desert, the Covenant meal and the Paschal meal serve as the Old and New Testament figures of the sacrament of the Eucharist.

Daniélou notes that the Fathers regarded Melchisedech as the figure of Christ.¹⁹⁴ Their conclusion was based on the psalm verse, “In holy splendor, before the daystar, like the dew I begot you...Like Melchizedek you are a priest forever.” (Ps 110:3-4) Because the offering of Melchisedech consisted of bread and wine, the Fathers claim this offering to be a figure of Christ’s offering of bread and wine at the Last Supper. Saint Ambrose refers to this oblation in his catechesis: “We remember that the figure of these sacraments came before the time of Abraham, when holy Melchisedech, who has neither beginning nor end of days, offered the sacrifice.”¹⁹⁵ Daniélou argues that Ambrose intended to set the sacrifice of the Christians over the Mosaic, i.e., Jewish sacrifice. Daniélou continues to quote Ambrose:

Receive what I say, to know that the mysteries of the Christians are anterior to those of the Jews. If the Jews go back to Abraham, the figure of our sacraments came before Abraham, the figure of our sacraments came before, when the high priest Melchisedech came before Abraham the victor and offered for him bread and wine. Who had the bread and wine? It was not Abraham, but Melchisedech. He it is, then,

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

¹⁹⁴ On the patristic development of the Eucharistic biblical images, see Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 142-161.

¹⁹⁵ Saint Ambrose, *De Sacramentis*, V,1; Botte, 88; quoted in Daniélou, 144.

who is the author of the sacraments.¹⁹⁶

It is noteworthy that Melchisedech blessed Abram by his offering of bread and wine. As a figure of Christ, Melchisedech, “being a priest of God Most High,” (Gen 14:18) blesses Abram, who is soon to become the “father of a host of nations” (Gen 17:5). Christ, the Eternal High Priest, offers Himself as bread and wine, in the figure of Melchisedech, to Abraham, the father of the Chosen People.

The manna prefigures the Eucharist by virtue of the fact that God nourishes His people in extraordinary ways. The manna symbolizes the Eucharist as a spiritual food because it was nourishment that God alone could provide His people. It holds an eschatological meaning from Judaism and from the Pauline and Johannine references that associate the manna given to the fathers in the desert with the Bread of Life given by Christ.¹⁹⁷ Saint Ambrose sees the manna as a figure of the Eucharist. The “great marvel...that God rained down on the Fathers” prefigures the descent of the Bread from heaven, “the substance of eternal life...the Body of Christ.”¹⁹⁸ The manna is a figure of the New Exodus and a sharing in the plenitude of eternal life.¹⁹⁹

Meal sharing constitutes the theme of the remaining biblical events that prefigure the Eucharist. According to Daniélou, it is a meal that expresses “union with the divinity.”²⁰⁰ It originates from the ritual meal that followed the Sinai covenant and has

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, IV, 10; Botte, 80; quoted in Daniélou, 144.

¹⁹⁷ Daniélou, 149-150.

¹⁹⁸ Saint Ambrose, *De Sacramentis* 46; Botte, 123; quoted in Daniélou, 148-149.

¹⁹⁹ Daniélou, 150.

²⁰⁰ Jean Daniélou, *Les repas de la Bible et leur signification*, La Maison-Dieu XVIII, 133; quoted in Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 152-153.

become a memorial in the ritual meals of the Jewish liturgy.²⁰¹ The Book of Deuteronomy records the prescription:²⁰²

You shall resort to the place which the Lord, your God, chooses out of all your tribes and designates as his dwelling... There, too before the Lord your God, you and your families shall eat and make merry over all your undertakings, because the Lord, your God, has blessed you. (Deut 12:4-7)

The liturgical meal of the Jewish liturgy carries the theme of the Messianic Banquet. The meal is to take place in the temple, on the mountain in the city of Jerusalem. The Messianic Banquet takes place “in the house of wisdom” (Prov 9:1) on God’s holy mountain of Sion, in the City of the New Jerusalem. The events recorded in the Book of Exodus are fulfilled in the Person of Christ in the New Testament. The Eucharist is the foretaste of the heavenly banquet in the New Jerusalem. As Daniélou observes, all peoples are invited to the Messianic Banquet, a notion that far exceeds the liturgical prescriptions of Jewish and Christian liturgies.²⁰³

The meals of Christ are the realization of the arrival of messianic times as well as a figuration of the sacrament of the Eucharist. Whether at banquets or wedding feasts or with “publicans and sinners,” (Lk 7: 33-34) Christ shared meals to indicate the messianic and eschatological significance of meals taken with Him. They also were the manifestation of the “admission of the nations to the messianic community which is realized in the Church.”²⁰⁴ As the “House of Wisdom” where bread and wine are shared and eaten, the Church participates in the “eschatological feast”²⁰⁵ through the Eucharist. Clearly, Christ was mindful of the Scriptures when He established the rites of the offering

²⁰¹ Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 153, n.15.

²⁰² *Ibid.* 153.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 154.

²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 154-156.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 157.

and eating of the bread and wine. The Messiah, the Eternal High Priest was announced in the figure of Melchisedech who offered bread and wine to the father of the people chosen to be God's own. The Bread of Life was alluded to in the manna that came down from the heavens. Those who gathered to share the ritual meals in the Temple, or at table with Christ, were nourished by the promise of an eternal banquet where peoples of all nations will feast on the Divine Presence.

Secularism

Like Schmemmann, Daniélou regarded the situation of the world in the 1960's and 1970's as a "crisis of religion," or "secularism."²⁰⁶ In his view, an advancing technological and scientifically minded society was crowding the sacred sphere that had grounded Christian life, threatening to replace it as an "outmoded culture."²⁰⁷ Denying expression to religious thought within societies, or the possibility of its accessibility, strikes at the heart of the "collective significance" of the Church, i.e., its essence.²⁰⁸

The great danger, as I see it... would be that the religious experience would become a purely personal thing; that is to say, it would in practice become merely a matter of the personal conversion of a certain number of individuals, no longer a collective reality, no longer a popular or mass reality.²⁰⁹

Daniélou argues that any secularization of thought or of the society in general is not only contrary to the nature of Christianity, but it is "radically opposed to human nature and to the very nature of society."²¹⁰ He posits that imbedded within the very nature of humanity, as well as in society, is a longing for the sacred that expresses itself in the need

²⁰⁶ Jean Daniélou, *The Crucial Questions: On Problems Facing the Church Today*, ed. Frank Fehmers (New York: Newman Press, 1969), 18.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 20.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*

for communion with other persons and for a relationship with God. This presupposes the need for the element of worship.²¹¹ Recall that Schmemmann describes secularism as a “negation of worship.”²¹² Without worship, he argues, humanity obstructs the possibility of knowledge of God, the world and of others.²¹³ Daniélou’s conviction, like Schmemmann’s, argues that secularism is the movement of societies away from God and worship. He believes that a “truly human city” is one where the expression of worship is visible to others. He refers to Lapira, the mayor of Florence, who claims, “the true city is one where [human persons] have their houses and where God has his house.”²¹⁴ Daniélou adds that when societies lose sight of worship as the fundamental means of existence that opens the way to a relationship with God, their inclination towards fraternal charity and service to others is threatened, and often diminished. This is not to reduce Christianity to social teaching that has as its substance love and service of others, with Christ as a mere ethical role model. Rather, Christians must first seek to be in relationship with the Triune God through the Incarnate Word and participation in His Paschal Mystery.²¹⁵ Anything less would be a subjection to the invasive secularist movement that suffocates true human fulfillment and seeks to thwart the eternal plan of God.

Ultimately, Daniélou argues, the crisis in the Church and in the world is a “search for God” and for ways to incorporate “transcendence” into a society bombarded with

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

²¹² Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 121.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 120.

²¹⁴ Daniélou, *The Crucial Questions: On Problems Facing the Church Today*, 20-21.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

technology.²¹⁶ He submits that through the “mystery of worship,”²¹⁷ humankind is carried to the sole meaning of human life and creation: the Trinity. Having surrendered to this ultimate truth, the human person discovers the fullness of the meaning of all things, the discovery of one’s true self, and “the source of all bliss and joy.”²¹⁸ In worship, one realizes that the loving, Triune God intends from all eternity to share divine bliss and unimaginable joy with His creation in order that they might participate in His divine life.²¹⁹ Daniélou argues that all creation finds its source in the love of the Trinity:

For us, in our innermost beings, existing is merely being the condition of an act of love within the Trinity, which communicates being to us only in order to associate us in its life... Thus, the Trinity has communicated divine life to us through a superabundance of love. And this communication is a communication of the life of the Trinity, of the circulation of love in God, in which God solicits our surrender.²²⁰

God’s invitation to share in His trinitarian “circulation of love,”²²¹ or divine *perichoresis*, is a call to union made possible through Christ’s Body and Blood in the Eucharist. Daniélou writes: “This Eucharist appears as the privileged means of union with Christ.”²²² Eucharistic union deifies the Christian who is brought into communion with the Triune God. In the divine encounter, [he/she] transcends the secularization of a world that refuses to contemplate, to worship and to praise God. Daniélou concludes that secularization, the refusal of societies to worship, to know and to love God, is the greatest threat to humankind.²²³

²¹⁶ Jean Daniélou, *God’s Life in Us* (Denville: Dimension Books, 1969), 9.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54-55.

²²⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-56.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²²² Jean Daniélou, *God and the Ways of Knowing*, trans. Walter Roberts (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1957), 231.

²²³ Daniélou, *The Crucial Questions: On Problems Facing the Church Today*, 20-21.

Louis Bouyer: “Theology of the Eucharist”²²⁴

Oratorian priest, Louis Bouyer, argues that a Eucharistic theology “worthy of the name” originates in the theology of the liturgical tradition of the apostolic Eucharists.²²⁵

A true theology of the Eucharist proceeds from the proclamation and celebration of the Christian Mystery.²²⁶ According to the Benedictine, Dom Casel, the Christian Mystery is defined by the following:

But what, then, is the Christian mystery? If we mean to ask what it is in its deepest reality, it is nothing less than the transitus, the passage from death to life, through the Cross to the resurrection, which was once for all accomplished in Christ. The Mystery, therefore, is an action; and it is an action which took place in the past and can never be repeated, because it is perfect. The Mystery is the Cross of Jesus, the Cross seen primarily as an accomplishment, fulfilling His own human history and the sacred history of God’s People and, finally, the whole history of [humankind] which had been disrupted by the Fall but which, by the Cross, has been reconstituted and brought to an unutterably glorious conclusion by God Himself. The Mystery is, then, the Cross seen also in the fullness of its wonderful fecundity, that is, as including the Resurrection of Christ, His ascension into glory, and through the Christ Who has now Himself become Pneuma, life-giving Spirit, the radiance of all the wonderful gifts which He has given to [humankind].²²⁷

Bouyer posits that the Christian mystery is immutably etched into the Church’s liturgy and in her sacraments. Although the “historical circumstances”²²⁸ of the Cross are not present, Casel and his disciple, Dom Warnach believe that;

We must firmly maintain that in and through the liturgy, the all-saving act of Christ, giving life through His death, is truly and really present in its fullness as in its unity.²²⁹

²²⁴ Louis Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), 1.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, 4-5.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

²²⁷ Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955), 87-88.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*

They argue that one cannot separate Christ's life in believers, i.e., His grace, from His presence as a Person.²³⁰ Bouyer adds an eschatological dimension to the paschal mystery commemorated and proclaimed in each Eucharistic meal. He submits that in the thanksgiving of the Church's liturgy, the "substance of the Kingdom" is given to the faithful as an inauguration of the "festal assembly" in the new aeon of the Kingdom of God.²³¹ The Eucharistic liturgy is the memorial of the mystery of the Cross, Christ's giving of Himself for the world, in the eating and drinking of the "*agape* banquet" in communion with Christ.²³² Faith acknowledges and confesses that this mystery will reach its fulfillment in the Church in the "eschatological perfection through the power of the Holy Spirit."²³³ Within this context, the true essence of the Eucharistic mystery unfolds. The Eucharistic mystery is the re-presentation of the wonderful deeds of God for His people, proclaimed and memorialized in Christian liturgy.²³⁴

While Bouyer acknowledges the existence of many "theologies *on* the Eucharist," he submits that these kinds of theologies are, for the most part, externally applied to the Eucharist. What is needed, rather, is a theology that proceeds from the Eucharist. The grave dangers imposed by "theologies *on* the Eucharist" are manifested by the appearance of unnecessary and oftentimes irrevocable conflicts.²³⁵ Bouyer submits the example of the medieval controversy between the Eastern and Western traditions surrounding the "when" and "how" of the Eucharistic consecration. Was the "moment of

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, 464-465.

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ *Ibid.*, 471.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 1.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

consecration” the *epiclesis* or the consecratory formula?²³⁶ Bouyer’s response to the “old controversy that gradually became set and hardened in the theologies of both East and West”²³⁷ concurs with Schmemmann. Bouyer posits a return to the liturgical tradition of the early Church to discover the absurdity of such questions that have no correlation to the theology of the Eucharist. In fact, he adds, they contribute to the decay of liturgical practice. He writes:

But the theologies on the eucharist which are not concerned with what we have called the theology of the Eucharist, and do not even seem to suspect its existence, not only give rise to absurd questions and sterile controversies. They inevitably react on the Eucharist by more or less seriously altering and corrupting its practice...The liturgy... buckles even more radically under theories which owe it nothing, when people are trying wrongly to remake it in accordance with them. For here we are dealing not with those errors that are mere negligences or more or less profound oversights. They are errors that are committed solemnly and on principle, and on the pretext of enrichment or reform they cripple and mutilate irreparably.²³⁸

In Schmemmann’s view, the tragic reduction of the liturgy to its parts resulting from these kinds of inquiries, ruptures the interdependence and continuity of the multifaceted, yet holistic nature of the liturgy. The vital question to be asked, he argues, is “*what is accomplished in the eucharist?*” Furthermore, Schmemmann believes that “how?” and “when?” questions encourage a division of the liturgy into principle and secondary parts. The implications of this thinking make the secondary parts inconsequential to the theology of the Eucharist.²³⁹ The “moment of consecration” issue is one example of the dangers of imposing artificial theologies on the Eucharist.

Bouyer attends to the Christian Mystery always present in the memorial of the Last Supper of Christ and his Cross, i.e., in the Eucharistic liturgy. In Christ’s freely

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 7.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

²³⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 160-164.

chosen act of self-offering announced at the Last Supper, the Cross received its “salvific meaning” for God’s people. The solemn pledge given to humankind by the Incarnate Word of God memorialized the bread and the wine to be offered and eaten in communion with Christ and His Cross of salvation and redemption.²⁴⁰ Bouyer states:

Handed over for us to the Cross, [Christ’s body and blood] are given to us effectively here and now. In the eucharist, we therefore become one Body with him through the power of the Spirit. At the same time, the salvific act, immortalized in the glorified body, together with the perfect human response which is inseparable from it, becomes our own.²⁴¹

Bouyer adds that the reality of this sacramental mystery is the mystery that constitutes the greatest act of the Church’s faith. Christ’s Paschal Mystery is truly actualized in a sacramental way in the Eucharistic liturgy. Great care must be taken to celebrate this mystery within an authentic liturgy that remains faithful to the ancient apostolic traditions, to the revelation of Scripture and to the promptings of the Spirit of Truth.²⁴²

Bouyer and the “Theology of Liturgy”²⁴³

From its inception, the liturgical movement of the twentieth century was persuaded by the need for theological reform. Bouyer’s noteworthy contribution in this area was the catalyst for what would later evolve as the theological synthesis of “liturgical theology” developed by Schmemmann.²⁴⁴ Just as Bouyer argues the need to formulate a true theology of the Eucharist from the liturgy itself, he posits the liturgy as the source for framing a theology of the liturgy. He chastises those who inflict their own system of symbolism on the liturgical rites and texts, claiming to be liturgical experts.

²⁴⁰ Bouyer, *Eucharist: Theology and Spirituality of the Eucharistic Prayer*, 468.

²⁴¹ *Ibid.*

²⁴² *Ibid.*, 469-474.

²⁴³ Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety*, 277.

²⁴⁴ Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” 4,9.

Although Bouyer considers the Middle Ages as the era particularly culpable for these liturgical offenses, he does suggest that traces of this kind of “individualism” were present in the patristic period, especially in the catecheses of Theodore of Mopsuestia.²⁴⁵ Bouyer claims that Theodore formulated explanations about liturgical rites from his “own imagination” rather than from the “rites themselves.”²⁴⁶ This trend reached a climax in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries under Alcuin, Agobard, Amalarius of Metz, Amalarius of Treves and Durand de Mende whose theological “absurdities” are published in *Expositiones Missae*.²⁴⁷ Superimposed symbolism robbed the liturgy of its profound meaning and caused strong reactions from those who desired to restore sound theological interpretations to the liturgical rites and prayers.²⁴⁸

Throughout Church history, many substantial theologies of the liturgy have been proffered.²⁴⁹ In Bouyer’s view, the Fathers of the Church, for the most part, produced sound theological explanations for the liturgy. He cites the catecheses St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Gregory of Nazianzen from the Eastern tradition. St. Ambrose and St. Leo are among those who model theologically based explanations of the liturgy from the Western tradition. St. Maximus the Confessor and Nicholas Cabasilas are included among the contributors of the Byzantine Middle Ages. Westerners, Cardinal Boa and Lebrun represent the seventeenth century. Lastly, Bouyer mentions Dom Herwegen,

²⁴⁵ Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety*, 277-278.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 278.

²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁹ For a detailed examination of the history and theology of liturgy as the celebration of the Christian Mystery, see Louis Bouyer, *Liturgical Piety* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1955).

Dom Casel and the school of Maria Laach as forerunners to the liturgical movement of the twentieth century.²⁵⁰

Bouyer concludes that an orthodox theology of the liturgy has its beginnings in, but is not limited to the liturgy as its only source. As the heart of Christian life and faith, the liturgy as properly theological, must be placed in its “biblical and... patristic context.” It must never be isolated as a scientific study apart from its place in the life of the Church and each Christian.²⁵¹ For this reason, Bouyer posits the need for a canonical approach to the study of the liturgy that reveals its nature through the “mind of the Church.”²⁵² Since the time of Bouyer’s request (1955), theologians from both traditions have begun to formulate a communion ecclesiology that articulates the true nature of the Church as a communion in the Body and Blood of Christ.²⁵³ Based on the scriptural revelation of the gatherings of the first Christians on the Lord’s Day to break bread, to hymn and to worship, and on their liturgical experience, the Fathers of the Church preserved the true spirit of the liturgy handed on to them from the apostles. An authentic theology of the liturgy takes all of these into account.

Alexander Schmemmann and “Liturgical Theology”²⁵⁴

Fisch proposes that Schmemmann was inspired by Bouyer’s insight into the “theology of the liturgy” as articulated in his 1955 text, *Liturgical Piety*:

The theology of liturgy is the science which begins with the liturgy itself in order to give a theological explanation of what the liturgy is, and of what is implied in its rites and words. Those authors are not to be accounted liturgical theologians, therefore,

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 279-280.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 280.

²⁵³ Chapter Five of this investigation will conclude with an examination of the communion ecclesiology of J.-M.R. Tillard, O.P.

²⁵⁴ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 16.

who go on to work the other way round and seek to impose on liturgy a ready-made explanation which pays little or no attention to what the liturgy says about itself.²⁵⁵

Dissatisfied with the lack of theological and historical background offered to seminarians in the study of worship, Schmemmann feared that worship would become nothing more than “public cult” performed by a Church understood as merely “a society of believers.”²⁵⁶ Schmemmann was keenly aware that the fate of the Church was directly bound up with the fate of worship.²⁵⁷ He notes that the “theological interest in the liturgical tradition” that intends to raise Christian “liturgical consciousness” has joined the movement of ecclesial reform.²⁵⁸ Describing the liturgical movement, he writes:

And its substance lies in the genuine discovery of worship as the life of the Church, the public act which eternally actualizes the nature of the Church as the Body of Christ, an act, moreover, that is not partial, having reference only to one function of the Church (her ‘corporate prayer’) or expressing only one of her aspects, but which embraces, expresses, inspires and defines the whole Church, her whole essential nature, her whole life.²⁵⁹

Schmemmann’s vision echoes Bouyer’s understanding of the Eucharistic nature of the Church. The Oratorian Father asserts that the Church receives her identity in her union with Christ and subsequent union with one another. This reality, he proffers, is actualized in the Eucharistic liturgy.²⁶⁰ Like Bouyer, Schmemmann recognized the need for a theological approach to the liturgical movement that would awaken a revival in ecclesiology.

²⁵⁵ Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” 6.

²⁵⁶ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 13.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

²⁶⁰ Louis Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit*, trans. Charles Underhill Quinn (Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press, 1982), 297.

Two years after Bouyer's call for a theological reflection on the liturgy, Schmemmann formulated a definition and methodology of what he termed, "liturgical theology:" "Liturgical theology is the elucidation of the meaning of worship."²⁶¹ Its task is to design a competent system of "concepts and categories"²⁶² which will articulate the true nature of the Church's liturgical experience. This system must correlate with the faith of the Church and her doctrine. In addition, liturgical theology must seek to offer a holistic presentation of the liturgical experience of the Church that complies with *lex orandi est lex credendi*.²⁶³ Liturgical theology finds its source in the "fullness and interrelatedness"²⁶⁴ of Scripture and Tradition. According to Schmemmann, this requires a discovery of the theological foundation of liturgical theology in Scripture and Tradition that goes beyond the texts. Schmemmann defends this position:

Worship simply cannot be equated either with texts or with forms of worship. It is a whole, within which everything, the words of prayer, lections, chanting, ceremonies, the relationship of all these things in a 'sequence' or 'order'...only all this together defines the meaning of the whole and is therefore the proper subject of study and theological evaluation.²⁶⁵

Therefore, according to Schmemmann, liturgical theology must have a distinct place in dogmatic theology with its proper methodology so that ecclesial understanding is complete.²⁶⁶

Schmemmann makes a clear distinction between 'liturgical theology' and 'the theology of the liturgy.' He begins his argument based on the need for a clear understanding of *lex orandi est lex credendi*:

²⁶¹ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 16.

²⁶² *Ibid.*, 17.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19.

²⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 18-19.

The ‘essence’ of the liturgy or *lex orandi* is ultimately nothing else but the Church’s faith itself or, better to say, the manifestation, communication and fulfillment of that faith...The Church’s *leitourgia*...is the full and adequate ‘epiphany’—expression, manifestation, fulfillment of that in which the church believes, or what constitutes her faith. It implies an organic and essential interdependence in which one element, the faith, although source and cause of the other, the liturgy, essentially needs the other as its own self-understanding and self-fulfillment. It is, to be sure, faith that gives birth to, and ‘shapes,’ liturgy, but it is liturgy, that by fulfilling and expressing faith, ‘bears testimony’ to faith and becomes thus its true and adequate expression and norm’ *lex orandi est lex credendi*.²⁶⁷

When *leitourgia* functions as the manifestation of the faith of the Church, it is rightfully acknowledged as the “*locus theologicus par excellence*.”²⁶⁸ Consequently, liturgical theology is not about liturgy, it is about theology. Because the liturgy is the living experience of the faith of the Church, Schmemmann posits that the liturgy “is the very source of theology, the condition that makes it possible.”²⁶⁹ A theology of the liturgy, on the other hand, is a theological “‘discipline’ which deals with liturgy ‘in itself,’ has liturgy as its specific ‘object,’ ...and above everything else...[is an] attempt to grasp the ‘theology’ as revealed in and through the liturgy.”²⁷⁰ This distinction constitutes Schmemmann’s most notable contribution to the liturgical movement of the twentieth century.²⁷¹

Two significant factors of Schmemmann’s liturgical theology helped to shape liturgical renewal. Schmemmann argues that the first of these is “one of the main tasks of

²⁶⁷ Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgical Theology, Theology of Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform,” *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 39.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 39.

²⁷¹ Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” 7.

the Liturgical Movement.”²⁷² It is prompted by Schmemmann’s conviction that the ontological nature of the Church is her revelation as “the *epiphany* of the Kingdom of God.”²⁷³ Therefore, Schmemmann argues the need to recover the eschatological dimension of the liturgy, which, in truth, the liturgy manifests and communicates to the faithful. He adds:

The Kingdom, which for ‘this world’ is yet to come and forms the ultimate horizon of its history, is already present (revealed, communicated, given, accepted...) in the Church. And it is the liturgy which accomplishes this presence and this parousia, and which in this sense (in its totality) is the sacrament of the church and thus the sacrament of the Kingdom.²⁷⁴

In Schmemmann’s view, the liturgy is an “eschatological reality”²⁷⁵ that must form the consciousness of the Church. In truth, this property is what “defines the liturgy.”²⁷⁶ Out of this eschatological understanding of the Church’s liturgy, Schmemmann proffers a second significant development for the liturgical movement, i.e., the “articulation of the relationship between the *ecclesia*, the Eucharist, and the eighth day.”²⁷⁷ Schmemmann observes that the interconnectedness of these three realities shaped the tradition of the liturgy of the early Church. This relationship formed the “Christian vision and experience of the World, the Church, and the Kingdom.”²⁷⁸ The liturgical experience,

²⁷² Alexander Schmemmann, “The Liturgical Revival and the Orthodox Church,” *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 114.

²⁷³ Alexander Schmemmann, “Liturgical Theology: Remarks on Method,” *Liturgy and Tradition: Theological Reflections of Alexander Schmemmann*, trans. and ed., Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 142.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

²⁷⁵ Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” 7.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8.

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁸ Schmemmann, “Liturgical Theology, Theology of the Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform,” 41.

therefore, was ecclesial, cosmic and eschatological in one, “self-evident” and unified reality.²⁷⁹ Fisch notes:

The evidence lies in the early Church’s sense of the eighth day, the Day of the Lord, which the church perceived as revealed in and through an encounter with the Risen Christ within the Eucharistic assembly (ecclesia) on the first and eighth day of the week.²⁸⁰

Schmemmann believes that this theological connection is not understood and therefore, not experienced by the faithful today, even though it is present in a liturgical sense. He faults the imposition of a theology and a liturgical piety that disconnect the cosmological, ecclesiological and eschatological character of the liturgy. Consequently, the theological understanding of the necessary interdependence of these realities was lost.²⁸¹ As a result, Schmemmann concludes:

Thus the Lord’s Day became simply the Christian form of Sabbath, the Eucharist one ‘means of grace’ among many and the Church—an institution with sacraments but no longer sacramental in her very nature and ‘constitution.’²⁸²

Schmemmann is convinced that until this vital connection is realized once again in the consciousness of the Christian faithful, the *lex orandi* will continue to be severed from the *lex credendi*.²⁸³ As a result, the liturgical spirit of the early Church and the profound theological meaning of the liturgy remain locked and hidden from the Church’s experience of herself as the Sacrament of the World and the Sacrament of the Kingdom.

²⁷⁹ Fisch, “Schmemmann’s Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches,” 8.

²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

²⁸¹ Schmemmann, “Liturgical Theology, Theology of the Liturgy, and Liturgical Reform,” 41-42.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 42.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 41.

Summary

Great spiritual leaders rose up to face the challenges of the Church of the early to mid-twentieth century. Romano Guardini, Yves Congar, Jean Daniélou and Louis Bouyer were among the theologians of the Western tradition whose theological insight and vision of the Church initiated movements of reform that revived the Church and her liturgical experience. Their work not only led to the renewal of the Church of the Western tradition, they were the source of significant influence on the Church of the East. To Alexander Schmemmann, in particular, their theological vision not only inspired, but in many instances, determined his theological contributions to the renewal of the Church in both traditions. Romano Guardini's passion to restore the liturgy to its proper and central place in Christian life is one that is met by Schmemmann. From the Parisian theological community of the 1930's and 1940's, Schmemmann absorbed a zeal for the renewal of the Church from within, especially from Yves Congar whose ecumenical spirit modeled a wider sense of the Truth to the young Orthodox seminarian. Jean Daniélou's interest in the manner in which the early Fathers applied biblical theology to their liturgical catecheses inspired Schmemmann to recover the true spirit of the Fathers in liturgical understanding. In addition, Daniélou identified secularism as the greatest danger facing civilizations today. Like Schmemmann, he links this crisis to the failure of humanity to acknowledge the need to worship, to know and to love God. As noted above, it was Louis Bouyer's insight that a true liturgical renewal demanded a return to the liturgy as its source, that ultimately led to Schmemmann's theological synthesis of 'liturgical theology.' Schmemmann's theological formulation is acknowledged in liturgical studies

of both Church traditions, a work which ranks him among the theological giants of the twentieth century.

The remainder of Chapter Five will examine how the Eucharistic visions of Bernadot and Tillard implicate the presence of the doctrine of *theosis*. It will begin with a brief introduction regarding the liturgical tradition of the Order of Preachers. The explications of *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity* and *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de L'Église* will conclude Chapter Five.

The Role of the Liturgy in the Order of Preachers

The Latin motto *Laudare, Benedicere, Praedicare* (to Praise, to Bless, to Preach) surrounds the seal imprinted on the coat of arms belonging to the Order of Preachers. These words define the life, the mission and the spirituality of the Friars of St. Dominic de Guzman (1171-1221), also known as the Dominicans.²⁸⁴ Their lives are committed to:

prayer and worship, particularly the communal celebration of the Liturgy of the Church; evangelical ministry, expressed in sacramental administration, missionary work, teaching, healing, parochial care; and above all else, preaching in its many forms, including writing and the expressive arts.²⁸⁵

St. Dominic envisioned an Order that would work for the salvation of all humankind by sharing in the life and the mission of the Apostles. As stated in the Order's Constitution, their common life was to be rooted in the Gospels and "fervent in the common celebration of the liturgy, especially of the Eucharist and the divine office as well as other prayer, assiduous study and persevering in regular observance."²⁸⁶ All of these practices

²⁸⁴ Richard Woods, O.P., *Mysticism and Prophecy: The Dominican Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series, ed. Philip Sheldrake (New York: Orbis Books, 1998), 25.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁶ "Constitutions of the Order of Preachers," Section IV; quoted in Woods, 21.

were closely connected, and when properly balanced, served to prepare the Friars for preaching and teaching.²⁸⁷ Constitution IV concludes:

These elements are closely interconnected and carefully balanced, mutually enriching one another, so that in their synthesis the proper life of the Order is established: a life in the fullest sense apostolic, in which preaching and teaching must proceed from an abundance of contemplation.²⁸⁸

St. Thomas Aquinas captured the essence of the founder's vision to unite both contemplative and active dimensions of Dominican life into one goal.²⁸⁹ The classic phrase, *Contemplata aliis Tradere* (To hand on to others what has been contemplated) is taken from the *Summa Theologiae*. Aquinas writes:

Sicut enim maius est illuminare quam lucere solum, ita maius est contemplata aliis tradere quam solum contemplari. ('For even as it is better to enlighten than merely to shine, so is it better to give to others what has been contemplated than merely to contemplate.')

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According to William Hinnebusch, distinguished Dominican scholar and historian, the character of the Friars Preachers emerged from Dominic's experience as a "Canon Regular." Canon Regulars were priests who lived a monastic life although they were assigned to a cathedral.²⁹¹ Hinnebusch notes, "The chief duty of the canons was contemplative—the worship of the Holy Trinity. The canons existed to carry out the divine worship of the Church in a solemn manner."²⁹² They were called to a life of contemplation that was focused on the liturgy. Pope Honorius III issued a bull of confirmation in 1216 stating that the Order of Preachers was to be Canons Regular and

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁸⁹ Woods, 25.

²⁹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, II-II, Question 188, A.6; quoted in Woods, 139, n.14.

²⁹¹ Woods, 22.

²⁹² William Hinnebusch, *Dominican Spirituality: Principles and Practices* (Washington D.C.: The Thomist Press, 1965), 44; quoted in Woods, 22.

“their chief function was to worship God in a contemplative way.”²⁹³ By conforming their lives to Christ and cooperating with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Friars Preachers strove to ever deepen their union with God.²⁹⁴

Contemplative life is, by its very nature, a life dedicated to prayer. The followers of Dominic framed their entire day around the monastic liturgy of the Hours and the communal celebration of the Eucharist. Ashley observes that Dominican spirituality is fed by prayer as “the source of its light...especially liturgical prayer.”²⁹⁵ Through their communal worship, the Friars were able to meditate on the Scriptures and the wonderful deeds that God has done for humankind through the saving work of Christ and the Holy Spirit. According to their *Constitutions*, Dominicans are to reflect on the Divine Word and the Christian Mystery at all times. In this fashion, their life of faith becomes a constant search for Christ, the Divine Eternal Truth.²⁹⁶ Contemplation becomes the wellspring of spiritual wisdom that flows into the apostolic life of the Order of Preachers. Contemplative prayer that remains liturgical prepares the Friars for their ministry of preaching and teaching for the ultimate salvation of the world.²⁹⁷

Hints of *Theosis* in the Eucharistic Vision of Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P.

In his essay, “The Place of the Liturgy in Dominican Spirituality,” French Dominican, Marie-Vincent Bernadot confirms that the liturgy is the quintessential aspect of Dominican life. He notes, “The Dominican soul is urged to live the liturgy, for the

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ Woods, 26.

²⁹⁵ Benedict M. Ashley, O.P., *The Dominicans* (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1990), 21, 24.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 24.

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 236.

liturgy is, as it were, the prolongation of the mysteries of Christ.”²⁹⁸ Traditionally, Dominican spirituality has sprung from the “habitual consideration of Jesus and in Him the Holy Trinity.”²⁹⁹ The commemoration of the feasts and seasons of the liturgical year are the means by which the faithful reflect on Christ and His mysteries present in each age, sanctifying and transforming the souls of the faithful. Through liturgical worship, Christ’s mysteries are renewed so that all who believe may take part in them. Bernadot notes that those who worship God through these mysteries “participate” in the “Holy Humanity” of Christ.³⁰⁰ Christ’s saving actions are made present in the liturgy so that believers may be united with Him and share in His saving works. Bernadot adds:

To be a saint...is to become by grace what Jesus was by nature, is to reproduce in us, who are His members, that life which He once led in His own Humanity.³⁰¹

This “divine labor of assimilation” is realized in the Eucharistic liturgy as the mysteries of Christ unfold throughout the seasons of the Church year.³⁰² For those who follow in faith, each day of the Church year is an epiphany of the Divine Incarnate Word of God who offers a share in His life and His grace. In Bernadot’s view, it is the means of growing in the likeness of Christ and transforming one’s life.³⁰³ Therefore, liturgical prayer is the most important duty of Dominican life; one which prepares [him/her] for [his/her] vocation to sanctify and to save the world.³⁰⁴

²⁹⁸ Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., “The Place of the Liturgy in Dominican Spirituality,” *Dominican Spirituality*, trans. Anselm M. Townsend, O.P. (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1934), 88.

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 89-90.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, 90.

³⁰³ *Ibid.*, 90-91.

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

Bernadot's liturgical convictions are not limited, however, to the Order of Preachers. In fact, his Eucharistic treatise, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, was written for the expressed purpose to "instill in the laity" an awareness of the Divine Presence in the soul.³⁰⁵ By examining the Eucharistic mystery and its relationship to the Trinity of Persons, Bernadot hopes to lead the faithful to a deeper understanding of the Eucharist. He appeals to the Divine Truth implanted in the soul at Christian Baptism. It is at that moment that the "instinct for God" renders the believer capable of embracing and enjoying the marvelous truths of the Christian mysteries. With great apostolic zeal, Bernadot proclaimed his liturgical message beyond monastery walls into the homes of the Christian laity through this simple, yet profound text.³⁰⁶

From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity was first published in 1926. The title corroborates with the thesis of this study: the Eucharist is the means of participation in the divine life of the Trinity, the goal of *theosis*. The theological language used in the text is reflective of early twentieth century Western theology. However, Bernadot submits a vision of the Eucharist that is rich in Eastern Christian themes and, in the end, articulates the same theological vision of the Eastern Fathers of the Church: the nature and destiny of the human person is union with the Divine Trinity. (In the Eastern tradition, union with God is expressed by the doctrine of *theosis*). Bernadot concurs that the Eucharist is the means to achieve union with God and participation in the divine life of the Trinity. His work supports the writer's argument that hints of *theosis* were apparent in the Eucharistic theology of Western theologians of the twentieth century.

³⁰⁵ Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, trans. Dom Francis Izard, O.S.B. (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1952), inside cover.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, v, 1-2.

Perichoresis

Bernadot's text begins with God. The first sentence reels the reader into the unfathomable, unknowable and infinite abyss of divinity. "God is the ocean of Life,"³⁰⁷ he writes. He is an ocean of "Light and Love" longing to share His Life, His Light and His Love.³⁰⁸ Bernadot uses metaphorical language to refer to the Divine Persons of the Trinity. The Father is the Source of Life; the Word is the Source of Light; and the Holy [Spirit] is the Source of Love.³⁰⁹ Within the Trinity of Persons, this divine life, light and love is mutually shared in the self-bestowal and the full knowledge of the Other Divine Persons. The Eastern Fathers refer to this mutual indwelling of love and knowledge as Trinitarian *perichoresis*. Within the Godhead, the Divine Persons communicate the single divinity to each other from all eternity. It is a love so limitless and so effusive that God deigned to share it with His created beings so that they could eternally participate in His divine nature.³¹⁰ Divine life poured itself into the humanity of the Incarnate Word, "the firstborn of every creature." (Coloss 1:15)³¹¹ Thus, the Incarnate Christ becomes the "Ocean of Life," the Icon of the Divine Life issuing from the Father into the Son to draw all humanity into a share of that Life, Light and Love, Who is God.³¹²

Bernadot uses the phrase, "sacred humanity" of Christ.³¹³ By this phrase, he identifies the theological teaching of Christological *perichoresis*, which, according to

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

³¹² *Ibid.*

³¹³ *Ibid.*

Maximus, describes the “divine penetration into the human nature” of Christ.³¹⁴

Bernadot claims that divine life poured itself into the humanity of Christ united to the Incarnate Word. Thus, Christ, the Head, sends forth that Life into His members, His body, so that the same Life, Light and Love that is communicated by the Divine Persons to one another is given to Christ’s Body, the Church. This great mystery explains Maximus’ teaching of soteriological *perichoresis*, i.e., the divine indwelling of the Trinity within human persons that brings about human salvation. Based on the christological paradigm, soteriological *perichoresis* “include[s] the energies of the Incarnate *Logos* which interpenetrate the believer until [he/she] returns to [his/her] origin by an energy which constitutes the deification of the saints.”³¹⁵ Bernadot posits that life lived in Jesus, in the “sacred humanity” of Christ,³¹⁶ brings about the deification of the human person.³¹⁷

To live in Jesus, sums up and facilitates everything, places the Christian in regular correspondence and communication with God, helps [him/her] to realize [his/her] vocation which may be fully expressed in these few brief words: by Jesus to enter into relations of intimacy with God our Father in the Holy Spirit, who is subsistent and eternal Love.³¹⁸

Bernadot describes union and communion with God in terms of intimacy. Deification is a personal and communal call to share in the life of the Trinity of Persons, a community of Persons that is both personal and communal. This Trinitarian referential is profoundly Eastern in its character. To live in Jesus, in Bernadot’s view, is to share in His holy humanity and enter into Trinitarian life.

³¹⁴ Thunberg, 23.

³¹⁵ Maximus the Confessor, *Capitum Quinquies Centenorum Centuria*, *Patrologia Graeca* 90, 1312A-B; quoted in Otto, 369.

³¹⁶ Bernadot, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, 6.

³¹⁷ Bernadot, 6-8.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

The French Dominican claims that the presence of the Divine Persons in the soul occurs as a result of the presence of grace in the soul. While he argues, “Eucharistic union...is the most efficacious means of effecting that sublime work of supernaturalizing the soul,” he admits that the Three Divine Persons are already present in the soul.³¹⁹ Regarding Baptism, Bernadot notes that the fullness of Christ flows into the baptized bringing the “plenitude of life, grace and virtue.”³²⁰ The divine indwelling in the soul makes of it a “kingdom within,” (Lk 17:21) a “temple” where the Divine Persons continually act.³²¹ He notes:

The mystery of the Trinity is realized in the activity and love that the Three Persons bear to the soul; the soul being loved differently by each of them, yet with a single love. This love is single, because each time that the Three Persons act exteriorly to themselves, they act as one. At the same time it is a triple effusion of love revealing something of the characteristics proper to each of the Three Persons.³²²

In the above passage, Bernadot describes the “Divine Circumincession”³²³ experienced in the soul that resembles the “circumincession of the Divine Persons.”³²⁴ He defines ‘circumincession’ as the mutual indwelling within each other of the Three Divine Persons “in such a way that there is between them...a reciprocal circulation.”³²⁵ This theological term describes the “movement, an everlasting circulation of love,”³²⁶ shared among the

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

³²² *Ibid.*

³²³ Theological term whose Latin derivative “*circuminsessio*” is synonymous with the Greek “*perichoresis*.” *A Concise Dictionary of Theology*, s.v. “*Circuminsessio*,” by O’Collins and Farrugia.

³²⁴ Bernadot, 49.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, n. 1.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, 49.

Divine Persons. The nature of love, he continues, is to give itself and to move

outward.³²⁷ Bernadot describes the divine trinitarian circumincession as follows:

Between [the Father and the Son] there is an irresistible and mutual attraction, a force of love which unites and consummates them in unity. This unity of their mutual love, the subsistent term of the divine life, is the Holy Ghost. But this Love which proceeds from the breathing forth of their mutual and infinite love: this Love, the Holy Spirit which unites Father and Son in an inexpressible transport of joy, communicates to the soul a movement similar to the mutual attraction of Father and Son, permitting the soul to participate in these intimate relations.³²⁸

Bernadot submits that the way of entrance into this divine trinitarian life is by means of the sacraments, especially Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist. Baptism initiates Christian believers into Christ from whom all divine plenitude flows. The “supernatural union” begun at Baptism is fortified in Confirmation and is “perfected” through the Eucharist.³²⁹ Bernadot references St. Thomas Aquinas, “It is the work of the Eucharist to perfect [humanity] and unite [him/her] intimately with God.”³³⁰ Bernadot notes that the Eucharist unites humanity to Christ, offering the means of human perfection. As the “Sacrament of the Altar,” the Eucharist is the culmination of all the sacraments which unites the believer to Christ. As the “Sacrament of Life,” the Eucharist nurtures, renews and sustains the faithful with the bread of eternal life.³³¹ United to Christ, the faithful are sanctified and transformed by His divinity and made participants of trinitarian life. The Eucharist is “true participation” in the glory and the joy of the love of the Divine Persons that will be complete in the Kingdom of God.³³²

³²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

³³⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* III, 79, 1.1; quoted in Bernadot, 9.

³³¹ Bernadot, 10.

³³² *Ibid.*, 50.

As noted above, the title of Bernadot's small manuscript summarizes the thesis of this investigation. *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity* supports the argument that the Eucharist is the means by which humanity is united with Christ, transformed into His likeness and deified by the mystery of His Incarnation. Bernadot describes the mysteries of Christ as follows:

From the sublime heights of the Blessed Trinity, the Incarnate Word descended to [humankind] in the Eucharist; by the Eucharist, [humankind] mounts up to [his/her] last end, the Holy and Adorable Trinity.

From the Trinity to Communion: such was the route Christ traversed to accomplish His task of diffusing His Divine Life, the path made by Divine Love in descending to [humankind] whom He wished to save.

From Communion to the Trinity: is the ascent by which [humanity], purified and strengthened by the company of Christ, enters into the participation of his infinite reward. This is the ascending way of human love to God, to God Who draws the human heart by the inexhaustible felicity of the Beatific Vision.³³³

There are clear indications in the above passage of the Eastern Fathers' teaching on *theosis*, i.e., that God became human so that humanity might become gods. Explicitly, the Incarnation deifies human nature so that those who share in the Body and Blood of Christ are already deified, though not completely. Bernadot sees in the Incarnation, the descent of divinity that manifests the fullness of divine love in the Eucharist. Those who receive the Eucharist in faith and love ascend to the encounter with the divine Trinity of Persons. Bernadot posits that when the "Word comes to us...He does not come alone."³³⁴ The mystery of the Divine Trinity of Persons, "the abyss of the Divine Life," comes with each Eucharist.³³⁵ Therefore, the Eucharist is entrance into Divine Trinitarian *perichoresis*, the communication and mutual indwelling of divine Life, divine Light, and divine Love.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

³³⁵ *Ibid.*, 20.

Divine Grace: The Mode of Divine Presence

Given the nature of love that longs for unending union, Bernadot claims that the human heart longs for a lasting and permanent Eucharistic union. How does one account for the permanent presence of Christ after consumption of the Eucharist? He notes, “Assuredly, once the species are consumed, the Humanity of Christ ceases to be with the communicant according to its Eucharistic state.”³³⁶ In response, Bernadot posits that divine grace makes it possible for the communicant to remain “in permanent union with the Humanity of Our Lord.”³³⁷ God’s mode of presence manifests the depth of His love. It is a “contact of power,” adds Bernadot, that God grants unceasingly to the faithful.³³⁸ St. Catherine of Siena confirms the divine presence in the soul even after the consumption of the Eucharist. She records Christ’s words:

I leave the imprint of my grace, as the soft wax retains the imprint when the seal is withdrawn. In the same way by virtue of this sacrament the ardour of My divine charity, the loving mercy of the Holy Spirit, the intellectual light of uncreated Wisdom, My only Son, remain behind in the soul.³³⁹

Bernadot submits that Christ’s merits are always at work in the soul, manifesting God’s constant love. He calls it “the mysterious presence of His vital action,” the action that is “the center of the supernatural universe.”³⁴⁰ the Word of God takes on human flesh and gives life to the world. From His heart flows a wellspring of grace, of divine life and love. Christ pours His “ocean of His Love”³⁴¹ on humankind in the sacraments that sanctify and perfect the human soul. Salvation and redemption merited by Christ’s death

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 31-34.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, 34.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*

³³⁹ Saint Catherine of Siena, *Dialogue* 112; quoted in Bernadot, 34-35.

³⁴⁰ Bernadot, 35, 38.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 39.

and resurrection, continually flow to human souls as an “effusion of grace.”³⁴² God’s mode of presence, divine grace, is the source of all supernatural life that brings light into the soul and enables permanent union with God.

The Eucharist is human participation in the life and soul of Christ. Through this union, Christ’s life is constantly flowing in human souls like the sap that flows through the branches, giving them their constant source of life. Eucharistic union is the most intimate union that human persons can experience. Divine grace penetrates the depths of the human soul in “infinite tenderness” filling it with the fullness of God.³⁴³ Bernadot adds:

This grace is truly my life, my true life, much more so than the life of my body, or even the natural life of my soul. It is the me of myself, the soul of my soul...Such, that in its depths, its most intimate center, my life is the Grace which flows to it each moment from the Host.³⁴⁴

For Bernadot, the meaning of life is found in the Eucharist.³⁴⁵ It is a Eucharistic vision that frames his vision of life.

The “Supernatural Vocation” of Humankind³⁴⁶

The eternal plan of God destined the creation of human persons. St. Paul defines God’s plan for humankind:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavens, as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before him. In love he destined us for adoption to himself through Jesus Christ, in accord with the favor of his will, for the praise of the glory of his grace that he granted us in the beloved. (Eph 1:3-6)³⁴⁷

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 38-39.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, 42-44.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

³⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

As Bernadot explores the goal of Eucharistic union in the last chapter of the text, he grounds the ‘supernatural vocation’ of humankind in the words of St. Paul. “Before the foundation of the world” (Eph 1:4) God willed the creation of humankind. Included in God’s concern for human creation was a call to holiness leading to perfection so that humanity might become adopted sons and daughters of God in Christ. In this way, God is glorified in humankind who is called to “enter into the divine creative plan.”³⁴⁸

According to St. Paul, this is the “great mystery” that God has “hidden from eternity” (Eph 3:9) “according to the eternal purpose that He accomplished in Christ Jesus...” (Eph 3:10)³⁴⁹ Bernadot argues that the ‘supernatural vocation’ of the human person is to share in the “mystery of Christ” by conforming one’s life to the Person of Jesus.³⁵⁰ He urges the faithful to model themselves on Jesus whose entire earthly life was united in love to the Father and the Holy Spirit. One must never cease contemplating the mysteries of God in order to maintain union with Him. Whether one is at work or at rest, Bernadot claims that the soul must “*enter into itself to find God there,*”³⁵¹ just as Jesus never ceased contemplating the Father. He continues to observe that one must especially model Jesus in the difficult times. Temptation, bodily suffering, grief, and desolation unite us to the sufferings of Christ and “[hasten] the work of God in us.”³⁵² One must yearn for union with God that comes about through Eucharistic communion. Repeated acts of desire for union with God in the Eucharist along with repeated acts of Trinitarian love implant a joy

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 107-108.

³⁴⁹ Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., *Our Lady in Our Life*, trans. Mary Ryan (Westminster: The Newman Press, 1950), 123.

³⁵⁰ Bernadot, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, 108-109.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 55-60.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 70-86.

in the human heart that “make[s] it enter into the intimate life of the adorable Trinity, into what St. Paul terms “*the deep things of God.*” (1 Cor 2:10)³⁵³ Bernadot observes the ardent desire for Eucharistic communion that was expressed by the saints. Saint Catherine of Siena could not contain her longing for the Eucharist. She made it a practice to enter the chapel at dawn and exclaim to the chaplain, “Father, I am very hungry, give my soul its nourishment.”³⁵⁴ Saint Margaret Mary yearned for the Eucharistic Lord on Good Friday. She records her prayer, “O most loved Jesus, I ardently long for You, and although unable to receive You this day, I do not cease to desire You.”³⁵⁵ Saint Catherine writes of the supreme joy that Eucharistic communion brings to the soul. “O Eternal God,... You are the tranquil ocean in which souls live and are nourished. They find their repose in the union of love.”³⁵⁶ Bernadot adds that joy is “the fruit of love.”³⁵⁷

Participation in divine trinitarian love is the cause of joy for the Christian, and the wonderful gift of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Bernadot notes:

The Father, Son, and Holy Ghost love themselves with a love without measure; they are happy, eternally unchangeably happy... And they call us to communicate eternally in their life. To know this is a source of supreme and unending joy for the loving soul... It is one of the more divine fruits of the presence and operation of the Holy Ghost in the redeemed soul. It deifies the soul.³⁵⁸

Humanity’s ‘supernatural vocation’ to grow in holiness and enter into divine adoption is growth in *theosis*. It is a spiritual ascent that brings about “new rights to the divine intimacy” as one “makes new progress in the love of God.”³⁵⁹ Bernadot posits:

³⁵³ *Ibid.*, 87-89, 94-99.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 95-96.

³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 91.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 103.

The Three Persons inundate the soul with a new influx of life, and a new relation is established, more personal, real and intimate than that of the moment previously. This adorable mystery can be reproduced at each moment, and at each increase of love, there is an invisible visit of 'The Three.' Every moment that the soul increases its charity, the adorable Trinity flows into it bringing fresh floods of light and love. To what height might not the soul ascend by means of these mysterious elevations?³⁶⁰

Clearly, Bernadot believes that divine indwelling intensifies with each act of love, especially as those acts of love are realized in Eucharistic communion. Note the use of 'floods of light and love' in the above passage. As previously stated, Bernadot's use of light is a reference to the Son of God. He associates the Holy Spirit with love. The deification of the human person is a continual movement toward spiritual illumination and the love of God. Bernadot makes an explicit reference to *theosis*, using 'gift' language. Citing a passage from the gospel of the Samaritan woman, "If you knew the gift of God...", (John 4:10)³⁶¹ Bernadot introduces the theme of *theosis*. He notes later that the "unheard-of gift" is "participation of His nature and a communication of His life."³⁶² This 'gift' constitutes the doctrine of *theosis*, the 'supernatural vocation' of the human person.

The Holy Spirit: "The Artisan of [Humanity's] Deification"³⁶³

Bernadot posits that humanity's vocation to participate in the divine life and love of the Trinity of Persons is accomplished "by grace and the cooperation of the Holy Spirit."³⁶⁴ The Father's plan that humanity be modeled on the Incarnate Word is carried forth through the deifying and sanctifying role of the Holy Spirit. He is "the executor of

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

the designs of the Father, the artisan of [humanity's] deification,"³⁶⁵ writes Bernadot.

The Holy Spirit works to transform humanity into the image of the Incarnate Word of God, that they may become adopted sons and daughters of God.³⁶⁶ As St. Paul records:

For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, 'Abba, Father!' The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs, heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ...(Rom 8: 14-17)³⁶⁷

This divine privilege bestowed on humanity through the Holy Spirit implants an inclination towards God and establishes a relationship of love between humanity and divinity. The Holy Spirit is the force of love Who illumines the soul and fills it with the desire for an ever closer relationship with God.³⁶⁸

As the Spirit of Truth, the Holy Spirit turns the heart and mind towards God. His action illuminates the soul to allow for a more profound spiritual understanding of the Father's revelation in the Person of Jesus. Moved by these truths, the soul desires to become more like Christ. The Divine Love of the Holy Spirit moves the soul to "relations of love and a constant tendency to union"³⁶⁹ with the Trinity of Persons. As the faithful respond to the action of the Spirit in the soul, the Spirit of Love perfects the union of the soul with Christ.³⁷⁰

Bernadot submits that the Holy Spirit engraves on the soul a "new resemblance to Jesus" with each Eucharistic communion.³⁷¹ He also argues that the Eucharist enables

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 110.

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 110-111.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 111.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 113.

the faithful to become sharers in the life of the Spirit, enkindling the same grace, virtues and acts as He did in the humanity of Jesus. This principle accounts for the holiness of the saints whose lives were lived in likeness to Christ. United to Him in heart, in mind, and in soul, their lives became a reflection of Christ's life, transforming them into true Christian sons and daughters of God.³⁷²

Divine Adoption and the Glory of God

God's eternal plan to create humankind for a share in the divine plenitude as adopted sons and daughters demonstrates the magnitude of His love and goodness. Assuredly, humankind achieves the ultimate happiness in the gift of *theosis*. But Bernadot reasons that human creation "cannot be the last end of the divine operations."³⁷³ Human happiness culminates in the glory of God. Therefore, the gift of divine filiation has as its end the ultimate glory of God.³⁷⁴ As Bernadot notes from the Scriptures:

In him we were also chosen, destined in accord with the purpose of the One Who accomplishes all things according to the intention of his will, so that we might exist for the praise of his glory, we who first hoped in Christ.
(Eph 1:11)³⁷⁵

Human creation, by nature, is fulfilled in the glory of God, their Creator. Bernadot adds, "To glorify God is the essential and primordial work of the creature as long as it exists."³⁷⁶ It is the underlying cause and end of life itself. The Incarnation of the Divine *Logos* is the quintessential manifestation of the just duty of all creation to adore and praise God. Christ's Resurrection is the revelation to humanity *par excellence* of the

³⁷² *Ibid.*, 113-116.

³⁷³ *Ibid.*, 117-118.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 118-119.

glory of God. Christ's life models humanity's destiny and fulfillment as *homo adorans*. His death is the utter homage that raises all creation to the glory of God.³⁷⁷

According to Bernadot, Christ, the Eternal High Priest, presides at the heavenly liturgy to offer praise, honor and glory to the Father with all the elect in heaven. He argues that this same liturgy is served on the altars of this world with Christ as the Priest and Victim. They constitute the one Liturgy which "perpetually ascend[s] towards God" rendering Him praise, honor and glory.³⁷⁸ That is why Christ gave Himself to the world in the Eucharist so that those who communicate may share in the heavenly liturgy of praise. Bernadot notes:

Communion permits the soul to celebrate in its sanctuary the sacrifice that the Church triumphant and the Church militant never cease to offer to God: the same Victim offers Himself there to the same God for the same praise... Thus in heaven, on the altar, and in the soul is celebrated the same eternal Liturgy.³⁷⁹

In this passage, Bernadot acknowledges the eschatological nature of the Eucharist.

Having eaten at the heavenly Liturgy and transformed by the loving union with the Trinity of Persons dwelling in the soul, the communicant is deified as far as is possible, and longs for its final fulfillment in the Kingdom of heaven. Bernadot adds that as the communicant advances in holiness through participation in the Eucharist and growth in charity, [his/her] life becomes a constant expression of praise.³⁸⁰

Summary

However simplistic in its style, Bernadot's text, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, incorporates significant themes linked to the doctrine of *theosis*.

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 119-120.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 122-124.

³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 125-126.

³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 126-127.

Beginning with the title, Bernadot confirms that the Eucharist is the means of participation in the divinity of the Triune God. His relational approach emphasizes the union of intimacy that satisfies the soul's longing for love and happiness. Bernadot posits that this union is based on the union of the divine and human natures in Christ. As a consequence, humanity is able to receive from the Eucharistic Christ, the "divine generosity"³⁸¹ of the Life, the Light and the Love of the Father. Throughout the text, Bernadot employs these metaphors as he refers to the Trinity of Persons: Life from the Father; Light from the Son; and Love from the Holy Spirit. His Eucharistic theology is Trinitarian in nature and never ceases to confess that Eucharistic communion is truly communion in the Divine Persons of the Trinity. Therefore, the soul is "the sanctuary of the Trinity,"³⁸² the intimate encounter of humanity with divinity that constitutes the doctrine of *theosis*.

Chapter One of this investigation argued that *theosis* originates in Trinitarian *perichoresis*. Bernadot's text begins with the premise that from all eternity, the Divine Trinity of Persons desires to "communicate the One Divinity" outside Itself so that "beatific life" and love can be shared.³⁸³ Bernadot posits that the mutual indwelling of the Divine Persons, referred to in the West as "circumincession," is produced in the soul by the Eucharist.³⁸⁴ Without explicit reference to the terms, Bernadot's text addresses *perichoresis* in its trinitarian, christological and soteriological dimensions. The Eastern Fathers depend heavily on this theme in their understanding of the doctrine.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 19.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 5-6.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 49.

Bernadot frames his Eucharistic vision with the Scriptures, the Fathers of the Church, the Church's liturgy and the saints. True to the Dominican spirit, the entire text flows from the Divine Word revealed in Scripture. The Psalms, the Prophets, the Gospels, the Pauline letters and the Book of Revelation contribute to Bernadot's holistic understanding of human destiny in the Eternal plan of God. Among the Church Fathers, Bernadot cites Cyril of Jerusalem, Cyprian and Augustine, but appears to make more frequent reference to his Dominican brother, Thomas Aquinas. Bernadot limits the discussion of the liturgy to a very brief statement on Baptism, and Confirmation. His references to the Eucharist are not lodged within the Eucharistic Ordo. Rather, they focus on the personal reception of the Eucharist. In the final chapter of the text, Bernadot develops the notion of the one Divine Liturgy on earth and in heaven that harmoniously gives glory and praise to God. Finally, a considerable portion of the text is comprised of the prayers and writings of the saints. For Bernadot, their lives were the reflection of the transforming presence of the indwelling Trinity, especially due to Eucharistic communion. St. Catherine of Siena was most often quoted. The writings of Angela Foligno, Gertrude, Cardinal Newman and Albert the Great were interspersed within the text. Each of these holy men and women testified to the ineffable joy of the indwelling of the Trinity. Their lives give witness to the deifying role of the Eucharist.

The role of the Holy Spirit in the deification of the human person is clearly acknowledged by Bernadot. The Spirit of Truth penetrates into the soul with His transforming and sanctifying grace so that the soul becomes a dwelling place of God and humanity becomes co-heirs with Christ as adopted sons and daughters of God. Through the Holy Spirit, the Father etches the image of the Son in the souls of humanity so that

they may become like Him. In this way, Bernadot argues that the Holy Spirit is indeed the source of humanity's deification.³⁸⁵

While there is no direct mention of the correlation between the Fall of the first parents and *theosis*, Bernadot does acknowledge the deifying role of the Incarnation and the Paschal Mystery with a prayer of St. Catherine of Siena. She writes: "Impelled by the same love that created it, when evil fruits were produced, because separated from You the life-giver, You saved the dying tree by grafting upon it Your Divinity."³⁸⁶ Catherine continues to pray in gratitude for the immense love of God that saved humanity from death and reunited them with God. She adds, "But that did not suffice the flame of Your charity, O Eternal Word; You would water the tree with Your own Blood, and the warmth of that Blood made it fructify so long as [humanity] was united and lived in You."³⁸⁷ Using quotations from the saints typifies Bernadot's style of developing his argument. In a sense, their reflections functioned in a dogmatic fashion throughout the text.

There are a few themes correlative to the doctrine of *theosis* that are missing in Bernadot's Eucharistic vision. Rather than situate his Eucharistic developments within an ecclesial setting, Bernadot appears to focus on the liturgical piety of the individual soul. Although he does use language indicative of the plural, i.e., "we," "us," "our," mention of the Church is rare, if not completely missing. He does, however, refer to "Christians." Secondly, Bernadot makes no reference to the deification of the body, to incorruptibility or to immortality in his work. Thirdly, the destiny of the cosmos is not

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

addressed in the section entitled, “The Final Goal of Creation.”³⁸⁸ Bernadot limits his discussion to the creation of humankind. With little or no reference to the Eastern Fathers whose contributions formulated the doctrine of *theosis*, it is clear that Bernadot did not have this theme in mind in writing the text.

It is noteworthy, however, that, in essence, Bernadot’s text testifies to the relationship between the doctrine of *theosis* and the deifying role of the Eucharist. He writes:

In speaking of the Eucharistic union, with regard to the Blessed Trinity, we simply wish to say that Communion is the most efficacious means of effecting that sublime work of supernaturalizing the soul. Each time we approach the holy table, it augments the presence of the Three Divine Persons, there is a fresh influx of the Divine Life...³⁸⁹

It is evidence that the intrinsic link between the sacrament of the Eucharist and the doctrine of *theosis* is a truth that transcends theological speculation.

Hints of *Theosis* in the Eucharistic Vision of Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, O.P.

The Eucharistic vision of Jean-Marie Roger Tillard (1927-2000) is fundamentally and intrinsically intertwined with his ecclesiology. In the Introduction of his text, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, the French Dominican proffers his conviction that «*L’Eucharistie fait l’Église* » (“The Eucharist Makes the Church”) as his purpose for writing the text.³⁹⁰ Published in 1964, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, introduced a series of publications by Tillard that pertained to an ecclesiology of communion: *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, 1987; *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of*

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 117.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 46.

³⁹⁰ Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, 7.

Christ, 1992; *L'Église locale: Écclésiologie de communion et catholicité*, 1995.³⁹¹ In

Tillard's view, an ecclesiology of communion is a vision of the Church based on the scriptural revelation of the event of Pentecost. Tillard posits that the *ecclesia* designates and describes:

the immediate result of the gift of the Spirit...the community of the saved (Acts 2: 38-40) united by the power of the Spirit and the acceptance of the apostolic witness, in a communion (of solidarity, of koinonia, of prayer, faith and sharing)...³⁹²

Tillard argues that those who believe in the Resurrection of Christ and choose to share in His ministry by their witness to His saving message, are the true *ecclesia*. Having received the Holy Spirit and confessed the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, they enter into communion³⁹³ with those who share the common belief that salvation belongs to those who are in Christ and the Holy Spirit. Through Baptism, the believer enters into Christ and the Holy Spirit, and membership in the ecclesial body bonded together by the love of the Holy Spirit. Ecclesial unity is “perfected at the table of the Lord.”³⁹⁴ Tillard believes, like St. Paul, that the true nature of the Church is manifested in the correlation of the body of believers who gather to share in the Eucharistic body of Christ.³⁹⁵ Hence, Tillard's Eucharistic theology is formulated within the true theological vision of the early Church.

³⁹¹ J.-M.R. Tillard, *I Believe, Despite Everything: Reflections of an Ecumenist*, with a foreword by Mary Tanner (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2000), xi.

³⁹² J.-M.R. Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Community*, trans. R.C. DePeaux, O. Praem. (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 5.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 5-7.

³⁹⁴ J.-M.R. Tillard, *Flesh of the Church, Flesh of Christ: At the Source of the Ecclesiology of Communion*, trans. Madeleine Beaumont (Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2001), 33.

³⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Communion is not limited to a common belief or a common task. According to Acts, communion in the *ecclesia* is distinguished by hope in the “promise which expresses the destiny of [humankind] and [their] world.”³⁹⁶ To be the Church means to enter into the “age of the Spirit,” that unfolds the “last days” (Acts 2:17) before the revelation of the promised future.³⁹⁷ To be the Church is to manifest the “opening up of the era of Salvation.”³⁹⁸ This is accomplished by:

the Spirit, the apostolic witness which centers on the Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion in which the human multitude and its diversity are contained within this unity and where the unity is expressed in the multitude and its diversity.³⁹⁹

Thus, the community of Pentecost is empowered by the Spirit to witness and proclaim the Risen Lord Jesus who is the Promise of Salvation for all humankind. Bound together in the love of God and fraternal charity, they demonstrate that human authenticity is discovered in communion: a communion whose mission is the salvation of the world.⁴⁰⁰

Tillard’s text, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, asserts the substantive character of the soteriological dimension of Christianity. He notes:

l’Évangile tout entier n’est-il pas la Bonne Nouvelle du Salut? (Éph 1:3)... Enlever au mystère Chrétien sa dimension de Salut reviendrait à lui enlever sa substance même. L’expérience du Salut ne se situe pas à la périphérie de l’expérience chrétienne, mais en son cœur...⁴⁰¹

Is not the whole Gospel the Good News of Salvation? (Eph 1:13)... To remove from the Christian mystery its dimension of salvation would amount to removing its very substance. The experience of Salvation is not situated on the periphery of Christian experience, but at its heart...⁴⁰²

³⁹⁶ Tillard, *Church of Churches: The Ecclesiology of Communion*, 7.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 11-12.

⁴⁰¹ Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, 16-17.

⁴⁰² Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God’s People*, 18-19.

In the creedal confession, Christians confirm their belief in Christ as the *Soter* (Savior) who came to the world for humanity and for their salvation.⁴⁰³ From this point of reference, Tillard posits his vision of the Eucharist as «le sacrement du Salut»⁴⁰⁴ (“the Sacrament of Salvation”).

Tillard claims that the hermeneutical key to approaching the depths of the mystery of the Eucharist rests in the understanding of salvation as a Pasch, or a passage: “a *passage* from a sinful condition...to a condition of love...a *passage* from the world of sin into the world of God.”⁴⁰⁵ In calling the Eucharist the “Sacrament of Salvation,” Tillard intends the following:

Car notre Salut est une Pâque, un passage, donc un mouvement. Et cela moyennant deux temps forts: un temps d’arrachement, de délivrance d’un état d’oppression, et un temps de projection dans un univers merveilleux, dépassant tout ce que notre nature postulait, don de l’unique agape de Dieu.⁴⁰⁶

For our Salvation is a Pasch, a passage, a movement, accomplished in two powerful moments, a moment of destruction, of deliverance from oppression, and of projection into a wondrous universe, surpassing all that our nature ever assumed could be true, the gift of the unique agape of God.⁴⁰⁷

Placed within this soteriological setting, Tillard posits that the Eucharist, as the “Pasch of God’s People,” moves the “Church Pilgrim”⁴⁰⁸ through the age of the Spirit to the eschaton. He notes:

Disons immédiatement que c’est précisément dans cet entre-deux, ouvert par le baptême (dans laquelle le fidèle passé en la mort-résurrection du Kurios) et clos par la Parousie (dans laquelle le fidèle baptize [ressuscitent] en [leur] chair pneumatique), que se situe le rôle de l’Eucharisite, sacrement du Salut.⁴⁰⁹

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

⁴⁰⁴ Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, 18.

⁴⁰⁵ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God’s People*, 20-21.

⁴⁰⁶ Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, 18.

⁴⁰⁷ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God’s People*, 21.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 292.

⁴⁰⁹ Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, 30.

Let us say immediately that it is precisely in this intermediate state opened by Baptism (in which the faithful pass into the death and resurrection of the *Kurios*) and closed by the Parousia (in which the baptized faithful [arise] in [their] spiritual body), that is situated the role of the Eucharist, the sacrament of Salvation.⁴¹⁰

Tillard's soteriological vision of the Eucharist opens onto the folds of the doctrine of *theosis* to uncover the Eucharistic depths of the economy of salvation. In this concluding section of Chapter Five, an examination of Tillard's two moments of salvation lend support to the thesis that the Eucharist of the Church is the means of humanity's deification and final destiny in the "*agape* of God."⁴¹¹

The Eucharist as the First Moment of Salvation

The first moment of salvation has its historical roots in the theology of the New Adam:

Le premier Adam, créé à l'image de Dieu, s'élève par son péché, recherché l'égalité totale avec Dieu: en voulant ainsi s'élever orgueilleusement, il brise les liens d'intimité, de communion, instaurés par Dieu, précipite l'humanité entière dans le péché.⁴¹²

The first Adam, created in the image of God, arises through his sin and seeks out total equality with God. In wanting to rise up proudly like this, he breaks the bonds of intimacy, of communion, instituted by God, and hurls all humanity into sin.⁴¹³

The doctrine of *theosis* holds that Adam's desire to become like God was a reversal of the true nature of his vocation to deification. His choice against God broke the bonds of intimacy that he was privileged to share. Hence, deification was no longer possible for fallen humanity. Christ, the New Adam, restores the life of communion between God and humanity, raising humankind out of the depths of sin and death into communion in

⁴¹⁰ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 35.

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁴¹² Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 27.

⁴¹³ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 32.

God's life.⁴¹⁴ God intervenes to redeem humankind in Christ, the New Adam, breaking the bonds of sin and accomplishing the first moment of salvation.

At the Last Supper, Christ gives Himself in the wine of the New Covenant and the bread broken for all humankind. According to Tillard, the Apostles who ate and drank of the body and blood of the Lord were united with God and liberated from sin and death. Christ accomplishes the Paschal Covenant made with them in his death and resurrection, his passing "from this world to the glorious world of his resurrection, from the world of sin and death to the world of God and Life."⁴¹⁵ Tillard also notes the implications of the Paschal Covenant for the mystery of the Church:

La formule de l'institution, surtout dans Matthieu, nous a révélé que la coupe eucharistique contenait le sang du Christ pascal réalisant dans le fidèle qui le boit un déracinement du monde du péché au profit d'un enracinement plus intense dans l'Église de Dieu, Peuple de la Nouvelle Alliance.⁴¹⁶

The formula of the institution, especially in Matthew, revealed to us that the eucharistic cup contained the blood of the paschal Christ realizing in the faithful who drink it an uprooting from the world of sin to the profit of a more intense

inrooting into the Church of God, the People of the New Covenant.⁴¹⁷

Christ gives himself to the Church as risen and glorified so that the Eucharistic bread becomes for Her the Sacrament of Salvation. The community of believers is transformed by the sanctifying and deifying action of the Holy Spirit, as they march one step closer to the Parousia. Having been purified by the Eucharist, God's People move away from sin

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴¹⁶ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 116.

⁴¹⁷ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 140.

and closer to His love. Each Eucharist is a renewal of the Paschal Covenant of Salvation made by Christ at the Last Supper and accomplished by His death and resurrection.⁴¹⁸

The purifying and redeeming value of the Eucharist was a matter of concern for the early Fathers of the Church. As Tillard recalls the position of the Eastern Fathers of the Church on this matter, *theosis* themes begin to appear. Ignatius of Antioch writes that the Eucharist conquers sin, enables the resurrection of the body and immortality in eternal life with Christ. Tillard concludes that Ignatius' medicinal approach to the Eucharist stems from his view of sin as a poison that only Christ can heal. The Eucharist is "a cure for sin and [a] gift of incorruptibility by the flesh and blood of the Lord..."⁴¹⁹ St. Cyril of Alexandria asserts the purifying value of the Eucharist but acknowledges the sanctifying quality as well. Immortality is only possible because of the purifying effect of the Eucharist. He posits that the Eucharist mediates the merits of the Incarnation of the Son of God in the same way that Christ healed those whom he touched with his "sacred flesh [that] bore in it the energy of the power of the *Logos*."⁴²⁰ Tillard applauds Cyril's Eucharistic theology, noting the richness of its development as the Sacrament of Salvation:

Parce qu'elle est le corps du Logos divin, ce Logos qui s'est mélangé en Jésus à l'humanité comme telle... l'Eucharistie porte une mystérieuse vertu. celle-ci permet ...de diviniser [l'humanité] de [leur] amener à participer à l'immortalité de Dieu. Mais parce que celui qu'il faut ainsi transformer gît dans le péché, il faut [le/la] en arracher, lui ôter sa souillure, [le/la] guérir de ses blessures, [le/la] réconforter. Tout cela elle l'accomplit dans l'acte même où elle divinise.⁴²¹

Because it is the body of the divine Logos who is blended in Jesus in humanity

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 129, 135-136.

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 142-143.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁴²¹ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 126.

as such...the Eucharist bears a mysterious power. It permits to deify [humanity] to lead [him/her] to partake of the immortality of God. But because [he/she] whom it must transform is buried in sin, it must snatch [him/her] out of it, remove [his/her] blot, cure [him/her] of [his/her] wounds, strengthen [him/her]. All that is accomplished at the same time that [he/she] is deified.⁴²²

Cyril's text accents the divinizing role of Christ's body in the Eucharist. Purified from sin, the members of the one Body of Christ enter the first moment of salvation that permits them to share in the immortality of God. Tillard marvels at the ecclesial character of Cyril's theology that highlights the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Salvation.⁴²³ Finally, Tillard looks to Gregory of Nyssa as "the witness *par excellence*... of the divinizing role of the Eucharistic body of the divine *Logos* who comes to sow in the flesh of the faithful a seed of immortality."⁴²⁴ Tillard notes Gregory's medicinal approach that credits the Eucharist as the "antidote" for the "deadly poison of sin."⁴²⁵ However, Gregory adds that the divine food is also the bread of divinization. Tillard describes Gregory's "twofold means of sanctification:"

Par la foi, l'âme se mêle à l'auteur du Salut et trouve en ce mélange à la fois guérison et divinization, par le pain de l'Eulogie, le corps se mêle au corps immortel «qui s'est montré plus fort que la mort» et trouve là à la fois guérison et immortalité.⁴²⁶

By faith, the soul blends with the author of Salvation and finds in this mixture at once cure and divinization; by the bread of the Eulogia (Eucharist), the body blends with the immortal body 'which has shown superior to death' and finds there at once cure and immortality.⁴²⁷

Tillard's vision of the Eucharist as the Sacrament that manifests two moments of Salvation appears to be grounded in Gregory's theory of the "twofold means of

⁴²² Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 152-153.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 153-155.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 155.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁶ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 129.

⁴²⁷ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 156.

sanctification” within the Eucharist. Tillard, like Gregory, argues that the Eucharist, which lifts the faithful out of their sinful condition, is the healing food that transforms and transports them into the new life in God. With Ignatius, Cyril of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, Tillard concurs that the Eucharist is the food of immortality, incorruptibility and divinization.

It is not surprising, then, that Tillard turns to the liturgies of the Eastern tradition to find support for his Eucharistic theory of two moments. He offers four examples to demonstrate the liturgical basis of the Eucharist as the means of forgiveness of sins and the way to eternal life. Recorded in the “Clementine Liturgy of Book VIII of the Apostolic Constitutions,” is the following prayer after communion:

Now we have received the precious body and the precious blood of Christ, let us give thanks to Him who has thought us worthy to partake of these His holy mysteries; and let us beseech Him that it may not be to us for condemnation, but for salvation, to the advantage of soul and body, to the preservation of piety, to the remission of sin, and to the life of the world to come.⁴²⁸

Another example of the twofold salvific efficacy of the Eucharist is found in the Liturgy of Saint James. Tillard observes the recurrence of the theme of unworthiness throughout the liturgical prayers recited by the priest for himself and for the faithful. An example is found in the communion prayer:⁴²⁹

Christ, Lord, our God, heavenly bread, nourishment of the whole world, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I am not worthy to participate in the communion of your Holy and Immaculate Mysteries. But in your ineffable goodness and patience make me worthy of partaking, not for my judgment and without confusion, of your most holy body and your precious blood, for the remission of my sins and eternal

⁴²⁸ Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, eds., *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. VII, *Clementine Liturgy of Book VIII of the Apostolic Constitutions* (New York: 1926), 491; quoted in Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 168.

⁴²⁹ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 168.

life.⁴³⁰

Tillard links the Byzantine tradition of the “prerequisite holiness” necessary to approach the Eucharist to the “purifying effect of the Eucharistic food.”⁴³¹ The Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom echoes the theme of worthiness as well as the twofold role of the Eucharist:

O Christ, allow me to pour out tears which erase the stains of my heart in order that with a purified conscience I might approach with faith and fear, Lord, the communion of your divine gifts. May your immaculate body and your divine blood be profitable to me for the remission of my sins, for the communion of the Holy Spirit, for eternal life, and to take from me grief and tribulation, O Friend of [humankind]⁴³²

Tillard submits that many other examples from the Eastern rite could be given with regard to the power of the Eucharist to forgive sins and gain eternal life.⁴³³ All of them, however, find their source in the Scriptures. Prominent among them is the account of the passage of the Israelites from the condition of slavery to a new life in the Land of Promise. With God’s intervention and Moses as their guide, they crossed through the waters of the Red Sea into the freedom of a fertile and bountiful land. The early Fathers regarded this event as the prototype of the Paschal Mystery of Christ who opened the way of salvation and the inheritance of eternal life.⁴³⁴ God intervenes so that humankind might be led “”into the intimacy of his life and the share of his gifts in the ‘communion of life.’”⁴³⁵ Each Eucharist is a share in the Paschal Mystery accomplished once for all by

⁴³⁰ B.-Ch. Mercier, *La Liturgie de Saint-Jacques*, édition critique du texte grec avec traduction latine, *Patrologia orientalis*, 26 (Paris, 1950), 232; quoted in Tillard, 169.

⁴³¹ Tillard, 173.

⁴³² E. Mercenier et F. Paris, *La prière des Églises de rite byzantin* (Chevetogne, 1937), 290; quoted in Tillard, 174.

⁴³³ Tillard, 175-176.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 28-29.

Christ through his death and resurrection. According to Tillard, each Eucharist actualizes two moments of salvation:

Il s'agit de sortir l'homme d'un péché d'inimitié librement contracté et de l'introduire au cœur même de l'intimité divine, dans la communion de Vie.⁴³⁶

It is a question of taking [humankind] out of a sin of hostility and of leading [him/her] to the very heart of divine intimacy in the communion of Life.⁴³⁷

For Tillard, the 'communion of life' describes the union of humanity with God and each other accomplished in Christ and the Holy Spirit. It is the Church in her very act of unity, the celebration of the Eucharist as the sacrament of salvation⁴³⁸ and the foretaste of the Kingdom of God. The 'communion of life' is the actualization of *theosis*.

The Eucharist as the Second Moment of Salvation

For Judaism, the memorial celebration of the Passover meal is a collective and liturgical act of hope and promise. As each generation enters into the experience of the People of Israel, they are invigorated by the liberating intervention of God that becomes present in the sacramental meal. Filled with hope by the assurance that God is faithful to his Covenant, God's Chosen People look toward the future with great expectation for the coming of the Messiah. The ritual meal itself breeds a "collective hope" that God will increase His People's inheritance as they are delivered to the Messianic Promise.⁴³⁹ The Passover meal is more than a memorial of God's deliverance in the past and His sacramental deliverance of the present. Radically bent towards the future, the memorial of the Passover is inherently eschatological.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁶ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 33.

⁴³⁷ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 39.

⁴³⁸ Tillard, 42-43.

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, 212-215.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 213.

Tillard argues that the eschatological hope of the Passover meal is augmented by Christ at the Last Supper. The Eucharist, given in the paschal setting, becomes the memorial of Christ's own passage of salvation for humankind. It is the New Covenant made in Christ's blood that fulfills all the hopes of Israel. In the Eucharistic meal, Christ communicates "his own historical Pasch" which will accomplish the redemption of a fallen world and restore its hope in a future life in communion with God.⁴⁴¹ Using the Scriptures, Tillard highlights the eschatological dimension of the Eucharist that emerges from the paschal context of the Last Supper:

I have eagerly desired to share this Passover with you before I suffer; for I tell you, I shall not eat it again, until there is fulfillment in the Kingdom of God. Then he took a cup, gave thanks, and said, Take this and share it among yourselves; for I tell you that from this time on I shall not drink of the fruit of the vine until the kingdom of God comes. (Lk 22:15-18)⁴⁴²

Christ's reference to the messianic banquet instills a renewed sense of hope in the eschatological value of the new memorial Pasch given by Christ. The New Covenant is sealed in the eating and drinking of the Lord's Supper:

Then he took the bread, said the blessing, broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body, which will be given for you; do this in memory of me.' And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you. (Lk 22: 19-20)⁴⁴³

Tillard notes that the promise of the messianic meal gives Israel the assurance they have long awaited with each Passover memorial. Now each time they come together to partake of the Lord's Supper, they are renewed in a confident hope that will be realized in

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 215-217.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 216.

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*

the eschatological fulfillment of the Kingdom of the Promised Land when they participate in the eternal messianic meal.⁴⁴⁴

There is a further element of Eucharistic meal sharing that describes the eschatological nature of the Church here and now. St. Paul writes, “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes.” (1 Cor 11:26) This exhortation challenges the Church to foster an eschatological climate of hope wherein humanity is transformed.⁴⁴⁵ Tillard adds:

Lorsque, dans la synaxe eucharistique, le fidèle «annonce la mort du Seigneur jusqu’à sa venue», il ne s’agit pas là d’un future sans attaché avec le present. Car déjà—dans la participation de tous au meme pain, eucharistique—ce future, objet de l’espérance, se realize: l’Église, don’t la gloire éclatera au retour du Fils de l’Homme, se construit dans le contact vivant avec celui qui, déjà transfigure lui-même, la transfigurera alors (Phil 3:21; Col 3:1-4). Déjà, d’ailleurs, et de par ce contact, elle reçoit en elle les arrhes de cette gloire finale; déjà elle s’associe au banquet messianique parce que déjà le Royaume de Dieu existe.⁴⁴⁶

When, in the Eucharistic synaxis, the faithful ‘heralds the death of the Lord till He come,’ it is not a question there of a future without attachment with the present. For already—in the participation of all in the same Eucharistic bread—this future, the object of hope, is realized: the Church, whose glory will burst at the return of the Son of Man, is perfected in living contact with him who, already transfigured Himself, will transfigure it in this time to come (Phil 3:21; Col 3:1-4). Already, moreover, and by this contact, it receives in it the arrhes⁴⁴⁷ of this final glory; already it is associated with the messianic banquet because already the Kingdom of God exists.⁴⁴⁸

Even though the Eucharistic meal of the Church is served in this world, it is a true partaking of the messianic meal of the Kingdom. In the Eucharist, the Church is the

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 217-218.

⁴⁴⁶ Tillard, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, 182.

⁴⁴⁷ Tillard defines this term in the Pauline sense to describe the action and “transforming presence of the Holy Spirit” in the baptized faithful, deposited as a “token..of the plenary and definitive transformation which will attain its perfection only at the day of the Parousia.” See Tillard, *The Eucharist, Pasch of God’s People*, s.v. *arrhes*, 295.

⁴⁴⁸ Tillard, 219.

reflection of the future glory yet to be revealed in the new aeon. Therefore, the Eucharist is the ultimate manifestation of the eschatological dimension of the Church.

Patristic Witnesses

In Tillard's Eucharistic vision, the second moment of salvation propels the faithful toward the Parousia. It is a vision immersed in hope and assurance that the fullness of life in communion with God awaits those who partake of the Eucharistic mysteries. Tillard supports his conviction with the voices of the Fathers of the Church, whose witness articulates «*la conscience de l'Église.*»⁴⁴⁹ (Church consciousness) He argues that their profound insights offer «*dimensions radicalement inseparables du mystère eucharistique, et qui en expriment toute la richesse.*»⁴⁵⁰ (radically inseparable dimensions of the Eucharistic mystery and express all its richness)⁴⁵¹ For Tillard, patristic testimony resolves the uncertainty posed earlier in the text:

Si nous voulons comprendre en profondeur le mystère de l'Eucharistie «sacrement du Salut», il nous faut cependant poursuivre notre recherche et nous demander en quoi consiste précisément cette communion de Vie, terme positif du Salut.⁴⁵²

If we want to understand in depth the mystery of the Eucharist, the 'sacrament of Salvation,' we must pursue our research and ask ourselves of what precisely consists this communion of Life, the positive aspect of Salvation.⁴⁵³

In the optimism of the Eucharistic vision of the Fathers, Tillard discovers the contents of a life lived in communion with God. As a consequence, he argues, one draws ever closer to the depths of the Eucharistic mystery in the discovery of the divinizing nature of the Eucharist.

⁴⁴⁹ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 187.

⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 196.

⁴⁵¹ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 236.

⁴⁵² Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*,

⁴⁵³ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 42.

Through the witness of the Fathers, Tillard demonstrates that the salient themes of *theosis* identify the Eucharist as the second moment of salvation. St. Ignatius of Antioch regards the Eucharist as the “bread of immortality” that presses humanity forward towards eternal union with the Bread of Life who satisfies the deepest longings of the soul.⁴⁵⁴ St. Irenaeus of Lyon submits that those who partake of the heavenly bread of Christ receive the “token of the glorious Resurrection” and the promise of incorruptibility.⁴⁵⁵ Even though the physical body dies and is decomposed in the earth, it will be resurrected and transfigured because of the “germ” of transformation implanted by the Eucharist.⁴⁵⁶ Irenaeus also notes that creation shares in immortality because of the Eucharist: Tillard writes:

L'Eucharistie donne donc ainsi l'immortalité et l'incorruptibilité parce qu'elle résulte de l'action du Verbe de Dieu (source ultime d'immortalité pour la création) sur les aliments terrestres.⁴⁵⁷

Thus the Eucharist gives immortality and incorruptibility because it results from the action of the Word of God (the ultimate source of immortality for creation) on the earthly nourishment.⁴⁵⁸

Creation provides the source for Eucharistic bread and wine, thus enabling humanity to sacramentally unite with the Incarnate Son of God.⁴⁵⁹ St. Athanasius teaches that the divine Eucharistic food bears a quality that endows those who partake of it “the resurrection of eternal glory.”⁴⁶⁰ Tillard praises St. Cyril of Alexandria for his extensive development of the divinizing role of the Eucharist. Cyril posits that immortality and

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 226-227.

⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 229.

⁴⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 229-230.

⁴⁵⁷ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 191.

⁴⁵⁸ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 230.

⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 232.

incorruptibility were impossible for fallen humanity. Therefore, it was needed that human flesh participate in God's "life-giving power," the *Logos*.⁴⁶¹ The Incarnation of the *Logos* is the source of the Eucharistic mystery where humanity shares in God's life in order to be transformed and raised immortal and incorruptible.⁴⁶² Tillard explains:

Telle est la merveilleuse efficacité de l'Eulogie! La chair humaine du Christ, devenue vivifiante par son union à la puissance du Logos, se mélange à notre pauvre chair pécheresse et mortelle, mais pour nous communiquer sa propre vie et ainsi détruire notre péché et déposer en nous le germe de la résurrection.⁴⁶³

Such is the marvelous efficacy of the Eulogia! (Eucharist) The human flesh of Christ, becomes life-giving by its union with the power of the Logos, is blended with our poor sinful and mortal flesh, but to communicate to us his own life and thus destroy our sin and deposit in us the germ of the resurrection.⁴⁶⁴

In Cyril's theology, Eucharistic communion enables the deification of the human body united to the divinized body of Christ. Because the Church is still on the way to the Parousia, humanity's deification has not reached its fullness. Nevertheless, it is a divinization that spurs her on with the hope of final glorification in the Kingdom of God.⁴⁶⁵ Tillard offers the "patristic theology of the 'inclusion of the humanity of Jesus'" in the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa.⁴⁶⁶ Gregory submits that Jesus, the New Adam, is deified by the divine *Logos* incarnated in Him. His new life of immortality and incorruptibility, merited through his death and resurrection, is communicated to fallen humankind by the Eucharistic food. This principle, in turn, deifies humanity. Tillard summarizes Gregory's theory of the divinizing character of the Eucharist as follows:

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 232-233.

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 233.

⁴⁶³ J. Mahé, *L'Eucharistie d'après saint Cyrille d'Alexandrie*, *Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique* (Louvain: 1907), 691-692; quoted in Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Eglise*, 195.

⁴⁶⁴ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 236.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 234-235.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 240.

L'Eucharistie sème donc en nous, chair divinisée introduite dans notre chair pécheresse, le germe de l'immortalité par lequel peu à peu tout en nous se transforme en la «proper substance» de l'humanité glorifiée de Jésus. Grâce à elle, d'une part la plénitude du nouvel Adam se diffuse, rejoignant concrètement les individus qu'il contient mystérieusement en lui, d'autre part au terme de cette diffusion c'est encore Jésus que l'on retrouve. Elle divinise, immortalise, mais en construisant dans l'unité la plus stricte cette humanité nouvelle: de tous les corps des hommes[femmes] elle fait, non seulement nominale mais réellement, les porteurs de la chair glorifiée de l'unique principe de la Vie nouvelle, le Christ Seigneur. Son merveilleux pouvoir de «guérison» se dépasse ainsi en divinization dans le moment même où elle édifie l'Église, car c'est bien de celle-ci qu'il s'agit ici.⁴⁶⁷

The Eucharist then sows in us through the divinized flesh introduced into our sinful flesh, the seed of immortality by which little by little we are completely transformed into the 'proper substance' of the glorified humanity of Jesus. Thanks to it, on the one hand the plenitude of the new Adam is diffused, meeting concretely the individuals whom he contains mysteriously in him; on the other hand at the end of this diffusion it is still Jesus who appears. For the Eucharist divinizes, immortalizes, but rebuilding and strictly uniting this new humanity; it makes all [human] bodies, not only nominally but really, the bearers of the glorified flesh of the one principle of the new Life, Christ the Lord. Its marvelous power of 'curing' is thus exceeded in divinization at the very moment when it edifies the Church.⁴⁶⁸

As Tillard suggests, Gregory's contribution appears to concentrate the divinizing power of the Eucharist to life in this world and in the human body. Clearly, Gregory notes the transforming power of the sacrament that rebuilds and unites the Church, leading sinners to a life more reflective of Christ. He also emphasizes the seed of immortality and incorruptibility that is sown in the Eucharistic community. Tillard discovers in Theodore of Mopsuestia, however, a development that he argues reaches "its maximum depth" in his work.⁴⁶⁹ Theodore posits that the grace of the Holy Spirit, which transforms the Eucharistic bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ, makes those who eat and drink of it capable of eternal life. Although still in this world, those who receive the Eucharist already possess the gift of immortality and incorruptibility through the grace of

⁴⁶⁷ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 199.

⁴⁶⁸ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 240-241.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 241.

the Holy Spirit. It also insures growth in virtue and deeper bonds of charity to unite all as brothers and sisters. He admits that while in this life, one is incapable of the fullness of this heavenly reality; however, he challenges believers to receive the “figures and symbols” in hope.⁴⁷⁰ Only at the resurrection of the body in the Kingdom of heaven will the new Life and immortality sown by the Eucharist reach its fulfillment. Theodore also encourages the faithful to revere the Eucharistic mysteries and to allow them to instill an unceasing spirit of eschatological hope with each reception. The object of that hope, he posits, is that Christ bears the fruits of the resurrection to all who receive Him in faith and in the hope of eternal life in God’s Kingdom.⁴⁷¹ Clearly, the Eastern Fathers reveal the divinizing power of the Eucharist that leads the Pilgrim Church on her way to fulfillment in the Kingdom of heaven in the second moment of salvation. Tillard’s consideration of the Eucharistic theology of the Eastern Fathers has served to articulate his vision of the Eucharist as the sacrament of salvation that opens into the fullness of life in communion with God.

Tillard posits that the second moment of salvation brought about by the Eucharist recreates humankind in the *agape* of God.⁴⁷² This “radically free” love of God embraces humanity in the fullness of divine love⁴⁷³ that opens into “the very heart of divine intimacy in the communion of Life.”⁴⁷⁴ After all, he observes, remission of sins is not the final goal of Eucharistic communion. It is the first moment in the salvific Pasch of the Eucharist that leads to divine intimacy. «[Le Salut] consiste en une rédemption

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 241-246.

⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, 295.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

débouchant dans la communion de Vie, en une communion de Vie enracinée dans la redemption.»⁴⁷⁵ (“Salvation consists of a redemption opening into the communion of Life, in a communion of Life rooted in redemption.”)⁴⁷⁶ It is a communion that is dependent upon the grace of divine adoption that is given in and through the Holy Spirit, the Source of Life and Love. Tillard makes numerous references to the letters of St. Paul to highlight the role of the Holy Spirit, whose presence transforms Christians into adopted sons and daughters of God, making them eligible for their divine inheritance. In his view, the gift of divine adoption granted in the Holy Spirit enables salvation and participation in the divine life⁴⁷⁷ of the *agape* of God.

Fullness of new life brought by Christ in the Eucharist comes about because of a “mysterious circumincession” that Tillard describes by the notion of indwelling.⁴⁷⁸ Those who receive Christ live in Him and He in them so as to commune with the fullness of divine life. Like the vine, Christ is the source of life for all the branches that depend on Him for their very existence. What is more, to live in Christ is to live in the Father with whom Christ dwells and God in Him. Thus, to live in Christ is to live in the intimacy of the Divine Persons. As Tillard notes, the “universe of the intradivine intimacy: is “the ultimate goal of Salvation.”⁴⁷⁹ It comes about by communion with Jesus Christ, in whom all fullness and knowledge dwell.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁵ Tillard, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église*, 34.

⁴⁷⁶ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God's People*, 40.

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 34-36.

⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 46-50.

⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

Summary

As the Pilgrim Church journeys on her way to the Kingdom, She bears the gift of Salvation in the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ, her Savior. In her exodus from the world of sin to the intimacy of eternal life in God, She is fed and strengthened by the Bread of Life, Christ's own body and blood. She lives in the tension of a Church already redeemed and yet to be saved. Clinging to the Eucharist, she feeds on the hope of immortality, incorruptibility, and divine inheritance as adopted children of God and ultimate fulfillment in the glory of the *agape* of God. In each Eucharist, the Church renews her hope in the coming of the age of the Kingdom when the resurrected ones will feast eternally on the divine presence. Each Eucharist is the foreshadowing and the foretaste of the glory of the Divine Presence that exceeds all human aspirations and desires. With each Eucharist, the faithful receive the seed of their divine inheritance of eternal life.

Tillard puts forward a vision of the Eucharist that accounts for the fullness of salvation that it effects in the baptized believer. The Eucharist immerses the Church into the first moment of salvation by its capacity to expiate the sins of fallen humanity. Each Eucharist builds up the Church by transforming her and healing her of the deadly effects of human sinfulness. As the Eucharist continues to eradicate the divisions that sinfulness cause in the unity of humanity with God and with one another, this divine food continues to communicate its power to transform so that the Church is fortified in her journey to the Kingdom. Tillard argues that the Eucharist opens the way to the eschatological reality of the future life in the fullness of divine love. Thus, in these two moments, the Eucharist

exercises the most profound depths of its mystery as the Pasch of Salvation for God's People.

In conclusion, Tillard's text, *L'Eucharistie: Pâque de l'Église* offers considerable evidence of the organic link between the Eucharist of the Church and the doctrine of *theosis*. It is a vision that is steeped in Scripture, the living witness of the Fathers of the Church and the Church's liturgical worship. Tillard bases his Eucharistic vision on the belief that the Eucharist is what makes the Church. In the tradition of the Church of the first Christians, he identifies the Church as the assembled believers whose corporate body is actualized in the sharing of the body and blood of the Lord. Tillard acknowledges the divinizing role of the Holy Spirit who, by grace, transforms humanity into adopted sons and daughters of God. Tillard also grounds human capacity for relationship with God in the reality of the divine indwelling. Other salient themes of *theosis* emerge as he dialogues with the Eastern Fathers of the Church, especially as they proffer the Eucharist as the divine food that sows the seeds of immortality, incorruptibility and eternal life in humanity. Tillard clearly concurs with the Eastern Fathers Christological developments regarding the divinization of human flesh by the Incarnate *Logos*. He is well versed in Pauline and Johannine theology, which is replete with deification themes. It is noteworthy that Tillard devotes more of the text to the Eastern Fathers of the Church than to the Fathers of the Latin tradition. Clearly, he is influenced by their theological contributions. In the end, Tillard's Eucharistic treatise offers a convincing argument in support of the intrinsic connection between the Eucharist and the doctrine of *theosis*.

Conclusion

The Christian Church of the twentieth century has been renewed by the power of the Holy Spirit at work in the minds of her theologians and priests. Despite the de-christianized climate with which She entered its history, many of her sons and daughters raised their voices together as pioneers of an unprecedented era in the history of the Church. Rather than live within an institutionally defined Church that was becoming more and more isolated from the everyday lives of the people, certain leaders among their ranks forged through the uncharted territories of ecclesial and liturgical reform to reclaim the true nature of the Church. Voices from both Eastern and Western traditions were united in their conviction that the Church must strive to retrieve her original identity as an ecclesiology of communion.

Romano Guardini launched the spirit of renewal early in the twentieth century with his call for a liturgical movement that was to be born out of ecclesial reform. Observing how the liturgy was becoming less and less significant in the lives of Christians, he worked to reform liturgical worship on the local and ecclesial level. Guardini visited the Benedictine abbeys that had become centers of liturgical renewal at the time. The beauty and profundity that he experienced in liturgical prayer with the Benedictines, encouraged him to institute liturgical reform on the parish level. Eventually, Guardini formulated a theological synthesis of authentic worship with his text, *The Spirit of the Liturgy*, breaking grounds for the liturgical movement of the twentieth century.

Guardini's spirit was notably well received in France, especially among the French Dominicans. Yves Congar raised the need for an internal ecclesial reform that would acknowledge the undeniable issue of Christian unity. He argued that the implications for unity among the Christian Churches extend beyond ecclesial boundaries and onto the world. In addition, he believed that division among the Churches fosters a growing sense of unbelief. True reform, he posits, must be faithful to Tradition, while being open to change, especially if the mission of the Church is becoming thwarted. Firmly grounded in the Scriptures and the living witness of the Fathers, Congar cautioned that authentic renewal must be framed within the Paschal Mystery of the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ. Congar's interest in ecclesial reform sparked a theological investigation into liturgical reform. He was highly respected and admired by the Orthodox Christians in Paris. Undeniably, Congar's academic and liturgical experiences deepened the bonds of friendship with the Russian *émigrés* and solidified his commitment to Christian unity.

Jean Daniélou sought to overcome the advancements of a growing secularism that was seeping into the sacred sphere and unraveling ecclesial identity. Based on his convictions that the sacraments determine Christian existence, he urged a recovery of the biblical nature of the sacraments as proffered by the early Fathers in the mystagogical catecheses. These documents, rich in typology, grounded the sacraments in their biblical roots as eschatological, christological and sacramental. Daniélou notes the eschatological nature of the Eucharist revealed in the catechesis. The Eucharistic liturgy, he argues, "is a sacramental representation of the sacrifice of the Cross, [and]...a sacramental

participation in the heavenly liturgy.”⁴⁸¹ Thus, the Kingdom of God is already introduced by the Eucharist. Failure to appreciate the eschatological dimension of the liturgy plays a significant role in the inability to connect the liturgy with life and contributes to the secularist mentality. Daniélou’s work in sacramental symbolism and secularism exerted a great influence on the academic Parisian community of the 1930’s and 1940’s, especially in the theological endeavors of Schmemmann.

Louis Bouyer sought to recover the true ecclesial identity of the apostolic Eucharists. He argues that the communion of the Church is the content of the Eucharist. Therefore, the Church is most truly herself in the Eucharist.⁴⁸² An ecclesiology of communion, he posits, offers the theological grounds for Christian unity. The division of the Churches of the Eastern and Western traditions, he argues, is “the preeminent scandal”⁴⁸³ that must be reconciled. In addition, Bouyer saw the need for a true theology of the liturgy. In his view, an authentic theology of the liturgy must originate with the liturgy; be placed in a biblical and patristic context; and have a proper place in Church life. Bouyer’s appeal challenged Schmemmann to advance his doctrinal synthesis of liturgical theology.

Marie-Vincent Bernadot and Jean-Marie Roger Tillard join the entourage of French theologians of the twentieth century whose Eucharistic treatises contributed to the spirit of renewal. Written by Western theologians of the Order of Preachers, both texts, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity* and *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, reveal, to some degree, the divinizing role of the Eucharist. Their work supports the

⁴⁸¹ Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 128.

⁴⁸² Bouyer, *The Church of God: Body of Christ and Temple of the Spirit*, 297.

⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*, 511-512.

theological conviction of this study that there is an intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the doctrine of *theosis*. In his text, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, Bernadot offers the laity a vision of the Eucharist that demonstrates the depth of divine love that dwells within those who share this heavenly food. The utterly transcendent God, the “everlasting circulation of love,”⁴⁸⁴ enters the “Sacred Humanity of Christ”⁴⁸⁵ to be united with those who receive the Eucharist. United to Christ in the Eucharist, the faithful share in the “relations of intimacy”⁴⁸⁶ of the Divine Trinity of Persons. The Holy Spirit intensifies the divine indwelling with each Eucharistic communion and carries out His sanctifying and deifying role that transforms the recipients into the image of the Son of God. Bernadot’s vision is framed on divine circumincession, which imbues his theological reflections with a relational and participatory character. Tillard’s text, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, offers a more schematic synthesis of the divinizing effects of the Eucharist than that of his confrère. Profoundly immersed in the Scriptures, the works of the Eastern Fathers, and in liturgy, Tillard’s Eucharistic treatise acknowledges that the Eucharist is the food that grants immortality, incorruptibility and eternal life to those who share in it. It is the passage of the Church from the world of sin and death to the communion of eternal life in the glory of God. As the sacrament of the salvation of humanity, the Eucharist expiates sin and leads the faithful to the Kingdom of God where the fullness of life in communion with God awaits. Through the divinized flesh of the Incarnate Son of God, humanity is deified in Eucharistic communion. Tillard argues that the Eucharist is the content of the Church. He articulates his Eucharistic

⁴⁸⁴ Bernadot, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, 49.

⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁴⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 2.

vision as “the Pasch of the Church on the way to the Eschatological Kingdom.”⁴⁸⁷ In the Eucharist, he posits, humanity is led “to the very heart of divine intimacy in the communion of Life.”⁴⁸⁸ The true nature of the Eucharist cannot be denied. Tillard’s work is a testimony to the convictions of Guardini, Congar, Daniélou and Bouyer that the true essence of the Church is manifested in the sharing of the Body and Blood of her Savior and Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. This salvific meal holds the key to the future and the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist redeems God’s People from their sins and leads them on their journey through this world into the Messianic meal in the heavenly Kingdom.

The liturgical and ecclesial reform of the Western Church of the twentieth century made its way into the world of Eastern Christians. Western leaders of the liturgical movement looked to the liturgical tradition of the Orthodox to uncover the true spirit of the early Church.⁴⁸⁹ This “sympathy for Orthodoxy”⁴⁹⁰ began a conversation that broadened ecclesial, liturgical and ecumenical understanding, especially in the Parisian theological community of the 1930’s, 1940’s and 1950’s. In this time and place, Alexander Schmemmann was gathering the seeds of his theological vision that would bear fruit in his own Orthodox tradition as well as the entire theological community.

⁴⁸⁷ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God’s People*, 13.

⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

⁴⁸⁹ Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, 13-14.

⁴⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 15.

CHAPTER SIX

TOWARD A RENEWED THEOLOGICAL VISION

Introduction

As the conclusion to this investigation, Chapter Six will begin with a description of the observed intrinsic link between the Eucharist and the Patristic doctrine of *theosis* as exemplified by the Eucharistic vision of Alexander Schmemmann. This hypothesis will be supported by the Eucharistic visions of Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., and Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, O.P. Secondly, a close look at the inferential arguments that have surfaced from this proposed connection between the Eucharist and *theosis* will lend support to the claim that the initial suppositions of this writer proved to be even more relevant than originally claimed. Following these final arguments, the third section of the chapter will offer implications that a Eucharistic vision rooted in the doctrine of *theosis* promises for theology. The fourth and final section of Chapter Six will explore the need for further investigation to be done in the areas of Mariology, liturgy, and ecumenism.

Observations

The doctrine of *theosis* is central to the theological vision of the Greek Fathers of the Church. This teaching, which is fundamental to the Eastern Christian Church, provides the answers to the critical questions regarding the nature of the human person and [his/her] ultimate destiny. *Theosis* is grounded in the creation of the human person in the image of God. God's divine gift dignifies His created beings, those whom He calls to share in His likeness and in His divine plenitude. To enable human nature to share in His divine nature, God gives the gift of His Son, the Divine *Logos*, who assumes human flesh. By the divinizing action of the Holy Spirit, the human person is brought into

communion with the deified flesh of the Incarnate *Logos* in the Eucharist. Through Eucharistic communion, the believer shares in the divine life of the Triune God, effecting a union that, in patristic thought, inaugurates the content and the means of *theosis* and the ultimate manifestation of God's love for humankind.¹

The purpose of this investigation has been to retrieve the patristic doctrine of *theosis* to determine how the Eucharist can be understood in its light and to argue that the Eucharistic vision of Alexander Schmemmann provides the most compelling evidence in support of this thesis. Thus, an examination of the theological development of the doctrine as forwarded by such notable teachers as: Theophilus of Antioch, St. Irenaeus of Lyons, St. Athanasius, St. Gregory of Nyssa, St. Symeon the New Theologian, St. John Climacus, and St. Gregory of Palamas, concluded that the patristic understanding of *theosis* was grounded in the Incarnation of the Son of God and the transformation of human nature. The Fathers posit that the Son of God, having assumed human nature, fills it with His divine life and deifies human nature, opening the way for humanity to fulfill its vocation to *theosis* and to enter into a relationship of participation with the Uncreated Being of God. According to St. Gregory Nazianzen,² in the eternal plan of God, *theosis* is the purpose for creation. The Fathers also posit the need for individual divinization which is appropriated by the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist, as the tangible means of participation in the divine life of God. The divine indwelling, brought about through the sacraments, sustains and nurtures the Christian to grow in divine likeness and to mirror the divine attributes. The Fathers also point to the deifying role of

¹ Gregory of Palamas, *Homily* 56, 6, *Oikonomos* 207: quoted in Mantzaridis, 51.

² St. Gregory Nazianzen, *To Thallasios* 60; quoted in Clendenin, *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective*, 121.

the Holy Spirit who grants divine adoption to those who enter into the newness of life that Baptism offers. Divine filiation is the promise of the inheritance of immortality, incorruptibility and eternal life in communion with the Triune God. These salient *theosis* themes are already surfacing in the first generation of Christians who confess faith in the Risen Lord as the means of salvation, resurrection from the dead, and eternal life.³

Theophilus, an apologist of the second century, proffered that deification is possible after physical death for those found worthy by obedience to God's commands. He suggests that the worthy ones are granted immortality and incorruptibility by God after the resurrection of the body.⁴ Theophilus posits an eschatological deification that begins to formulate a doctrinal synthesis of *theosis*. St. Irenaeus, although a Father from the West, furthers the eschatological development of *theosis* by introducing the role of the Incarnate *Logos* and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Irenaeus argues that humanity is united to divinity in the Person of Christ, restoring immortality and incorruptibility, and become partakers of divinity through physical deification.⁵ Irenaeus also taught that the Holy Spirit communicates a transforming, created grace to the believer so that [he/she] may become adopted sons and daughters of God, worthy of a share in His glory.⁶ Irenaeus proffers the Incarnation as the means to bridge the gap that exists between the Uncreated nature of God and the created nature of humankind.⁷ Through Baptism and the divine filiation that it grants, humanity is endowed with incorruption and immortality.⁸ The Eucharist, combined with right moral behavior, nurtures growth in divine likeness.

³ Gross, 117.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 118.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 125.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 120-130.

⁷ Russell, 107.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 108.

Sharing in the Eucharistic body and blood of Christ offers incorruptibility to a body destined to physical decay, and immortality to the one who has suffered death.⁹ In the fourth century, St. Athanasius teaches that the Son of God became human in order to deify humanity.¹⁰ Athanasius proposes two moments of deification that result from the Incarnation. The first moment addresses the deification of human nature that occurs because of the divinizing flesh of the Incarnate *Logos*. The Bishop of Alexandria also posits that the entire human race is deified by the Incarnation.¹¹ The Holy Spirit, too, has a deifying role, according to Athanasius. Through His power, humanity is united to the divinity of the *Logos* in Baptism and receives the gift of trinitarian indwelling.¹² Thus, Athanasius believes that deification begins in this life and is fulfilled in heaven.¹³

Athanasius also makes the distinction between human nature and grace, and argues that there are two acts of creation: the creation of humankind and the divine adoption of humankind.¹⁴ Athanasius notes the deifying role of the Eucharist that he refers to as the “divine food,”¹⁵ and posits that those who unite themselves to the deified flesh of the *Logos* in the Eucharist, are deified.¹⁶ The doctrine of *theosis* is further enriched by the work of St. Gregory of Nyssa, also of the fourth century, who grounds his theological developments around the theme of the utter transcendence of God.¹⁷ In Gregory’s view, humankind is inclined towards communion with God because of being created in His

⁹ *Ibid.*, 109-110.

¹⁰ St. Athanasius, *On the Incarnation of the Word*, 54, 3, 65.

¹¹ Russell, 177.

¹² Gross, 171.

¹³ Russell, 187.

¹⁴ Gross, 164-165.

¹⁵ St. Athanasius, *Festal Letters*, I, 7, 508.

¹⁶ Russell, 185.

¹⁷ Gross, 176.

image in body and soul.¹⁸ Thus, humankind has the capacity to reflect and to participate in divine nature. Gregory posits the incorruptibility and immortality of the body based on the merits of Christ's Resurrection,¹⁹ as well as the effects of the union of the human person with the Person of Christ. He insists that humanity's participation in divine life does not annihilate human nature, but transforms it in Christ²⁰ so that human nature can share in the divine characteristics of immortality, incorruptibility and eternal life in union with God.²¹ Gregory's concern for the deification of the whole person is reflected in the sacramental dimension of the doctrinal development. He argues that individual deification takes place as a result of the new life received in Baptism and sustained in the Eucharist. The baptized are initiated into a relationship with God that promises deification. Eucharistic communion is a share in the fellowship of Christ that enables humanity to participate in immortality, incorruption, and fulfillment in *theosis*. From his sacramental theology, Gregory proffers the theme of the ascent of the soul to God as an enhancement to *theosis* understanding. As the soul is sanctified through the sacraments, it becomes more absorbed in the ways of God and in contemplation of Him. This is the beginning of the path to union with God as depicted in Gregory's spiritual treatise, *La Vie de Moïse*. The human person achieves *theosis* by the way of the light, the cloud, and the darkness. Each of these levels describes how the soul ascends in an upward movement into the unknowable and infinite divinity to participate in the inexpressible joy of communion with God. The contributions of the select Fathers listed above manifest the evolution of the doctrine of *theosis* up to the fourth century. As the theological

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁹ St. Gregory of Nyssa, *On the Soul and the Resurrection*, 466.

²⁰ Russell, 229.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 230.

formulation of the doctrine began to emerge, the Fathers uncovered the sacramental dimension of the doctrine, particularly in relationship to Baptism and Eucharist.

Gregory's theme of the ascent of the soul to God continued to be explored in the mystical theology of the monastic tradition. In the fifth century, John Climacus identified his experience of the vision of divine light with deification.²² John, like the other monks of the hesychast tradition, associated the divine light experienced in prayer with the Taboric light of the Transfigured Christ. Based on the light of Tabor and the Transfigured Christ, the monks formulated a theology of uncreated light. This teaching posits that created human nature unites to the Uncreated nature of God through the divine light which deifies.²³ The monks reserved their mystical secret to the ascetic tradition.²⁴ By the eleventh century, Symeon the New Theologian, abbot of St. Mamas Monastery in Constantinople, revealed his mystical experience of the divine and uncreated light so that others would become aware that contemplative prayer is possible for everyone.²⁵ Symeon's work is critical to the development of the doctrine of *theosis*, especially in his soteriology. He posits that God became human so that humanity might become deified.²⁶ Symeon also recognized the deifying role of the sacraments, noting that the Eucharist enables humankind to experience union with divinity.²⁷ Symeon's experience of the divine light led him to conclude that participation in the illuminating, divine embrace transforms and deifies those who, by divine grace, receive it. By the fourteenth century, opposition to the experiential dimension of deification reached its peak with the

²² Meyendorff, *St. Gregory Palamas and Orthodox Spirituality*, 38,40.

²³ Evdokimov, *The Art of the Icon: A Theology of Beauty*, 185.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Sherrard, "Introductory Note," *Philokalia*, 12-14.

²⁶ Russell, 301.

²⁷ Meyendorff, 55.

hesychast controversy.²⁸ An Eastern Orthodox monk, Gregory Palamas, proffered a theological justification for the hesychast prayer as a source of deification. Gregory's synthesis is known as the Palamite doctrine of the distinction between divine essence and divine energies. Gregory posits that God maintains his transcendent and inaccessible divine essence but reveals Himself as accessible to humankind through His uncreated divine energies, i.e., the vision of divine light.²⁹ An intimate encounter of communion with God that results in deification occurs for those who experience His divine light.³⁰ According to Palamas, the uncreated light is the glory of God that transforms and deifies the body and the soul.³¹ As the monks of the hesychast tradition articulated their mystical experience of the divine light in the teaching of the theology of light, the doctrine of *theosis* was reaching its final stage of development. Through the work of Gregory of Palamas and the monastic tradition, the doctrine of *theosis* arrived at its present Orthodox formulation.³²

Other elements serve to articulate the doctrine of *theosis*. The first of these roots the deification of humankind in the doctrine of *perichoresis*, the articulation of the concept of relationality in terms of shared being.³³ Trinitarian *perichoresis* describes the intimacy of the relationship shared among the Divine Persons and forms the foundation for the human vocation to *theosis*: God's call to humanity and all creation to share in the divine mystery of Trinitarian love. In Staniloae's view, the real act of *theosis* is located in

²⁸ Russell, 303-304.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 304.

³⁰ Gregory of Palamas, *Letter to Athanasius of Cyzicus* 13, *Works* 2, 424; quoted in Mantzaridis, 99.

³¹ Russell, 305.

³² Jules Gross, *The Divinization of the Christian According to the Greek Fathers*, with an Introduction by Kerry S. Robichaux and Paul A. Onica (Anaheim: A&C Press, 2002) x.

³³ Otto, "The Use and Abuse of *Perichoresis* in Recent Theology," 366-367.

the divine *perichoresis*.³⁴ According to Staniloae, the second element that informs the doctrine of *theosis* is that God created humankind and the world to participate in His eternal, infinite and inexhaustible love.³⁵ St. Maximus the Confessor argues the possibility for human nature and all created matter to participate in divinity based on christological *perichoresis*. This teaching affirms that the union of the divine and human natures in the one Person of the Incarnate Word, without confusion or separation, characterizes the relationship that God has with creation, as well as the relationship creation's entities have with one another.³⁶ God's plan for the deification of the created world is accomplished through the Incarnation of the *Logos* who assumes human nature and deifies it; the Resurrection of Christ, whereby human nature is restored in glory for full communion in God; and the deifying role of the Holy Spirit.³⁷ The third essential element in the doctrinal development includes the role of the Holy Spirit in the deification of all creation. As coequal and coeternal with the Father and the Son, the Holy Spirit unites humanity and all creation to the Incarnate *Logos*. According to St. Athanasius, this movement of trinitarian love is the divine adoption of all creation that inaugurates *theosis*.³⁸ Nissiotis argues that the precise deifying role of the Holy Spirit is actualized in the Church, which, he claims, "opens the historical road to the permanent presence of Christ in history..."³⁹ As the bond and unifying force, the Spirit gives the

³⁴ Bartos, *Deification in Eastern Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Staniloae*, 183.

³⁵ Staniloae, *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, vol. I: *The Experience of God*, 238-240.

³⁶ Thunberg, 51.

³⁷ Staniloae, 35.

³⁸ Gross, 170-171.

³⁹ Nissiotis, "The Holy Spirit and the Sobernicity of the Church: Extracts from the Report of an Orthodox Observer of the Second Vatican Council," 190-206; quoted in Staniloae, *Theology and the Church*, 49

Church her character of catholicity,⁴⁰ unites all to Christ in a filial relationship to the Father,⁴¹ and transforms and sanctifies Christ's Body into the reflection of the divine trinitarian *perichoresis*.⁴² These elements, combined with the work of the Fathers, will be applied to Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology.

From the time of the early Fathers of the Church, Eastern Christians have never lost sight of their theological vision of *theosis*: to become gods by grace and partakers of divine nature.⁴³ In fact, the doctrine is foundational to Eastern Christian theological thought as the basis and goal of all theology. As Lossky notes:

To know the mystery of the Trinity in its fullness is to enter into perfect union with God and to attain to the deification of the human creature: in other words, to enter into the divine life, the very life of the Trinity, and to become, in St. Peter's words, 'partakers of the divine nature.'⁴⁴

The Eastern Fathers posit that theology is the mystery of the revelation of the Trinity. Knowledge of that mystery in its fullness is the attainment of *theosis*: participation in Trinitarian divine life.⁴⁵

Theosis constitutes the true greatness of the human person created in the image of God. Its language permeates much of the liturgy and the life of prayer in the Eastern Church⁴⁶ serving to remind the faithful of their supreme vocation and the unique relationship with God that is possible by grace. *Theosis* is the gift of God that challenges Christian believers to grow in divine likeness and to realize their true nature as *homo adorans*. The doctrine of *theosis* defines the vision and the destiny of the human person.

⁴⁰ Staniloae, 53-54.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 63-64.

⁴² Bartos, 254.

⁴³ Lossky, *In the Image and Likeness of God*, 98.

⁴⁴ Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, 67-68.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 19.

Included in that vision is humanity's kingly vocation to determine the ultimate destiny of the world by transforming it into the means of communion with God.

For Alexander Schmemmann, the key to understanding the connection between the doctrine of *theosis* and the Eucharist is found in the patristic vision of the “*mysterion*” and “its mode of presence and operation—the symbol.”⁴⁷ Schmemmann argues that the sacramental symbol makes it possible for humankind to encounter and to participate in the living reality that is revealed and communicated by the symbol.⁴⁸ Schmemmann posits that the symbol is the means of knowledge of the otherwise unknowable because it provides knowledge based on participation.⁴⁹ The sacramental symbol of the Eucharist, i.e., the Eucharistic bread and wine, unites the human person with the “deified humanity”⁵⁰ of the Incarnate Son of God and enables [him/her] to enter into communion with the divine life of the Trinity.

Theosis themes are interwoven in the categories that constitute Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision. In his view, the Eucharist embraces three fundamental dimensions for humanity that articulate their relationship to God, to the world and to each other. Thus, the Eucharist is the Sacrament of the Kingdom, the Sacrament of the World, and the Sacrament of the Church. As Hopko notes, Schmemmann's theological orientation was grounded in the belief that the Eucharist makes present “God's Kingdom in the fallen world,” a world that is “saved, sanctified and glorified in the Risen Christ.”⁵¹

Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision, therefore, was framed on the cosmic, ecclesiological,

⁴⁷ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 141.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 119.

⁵¹ Father Thomas J. Hopko, interview by author, 7 August 2006.

and eschatological dimensions inherent in the sacrament. The Eucharist, considered as the Sacrament of the World, unfolds from Schmemmann's understanding of the sacramentality of the world. This view, especially revered by the Orthodox Christians, affirms that the world was given to humankind as the means to share in divine life.⁵² According to Schmemmann, Christians who appreciate the "sacramental character in the whole of life,"⁵³ come to rediscover the nature of Christian life as sacramental.⁵⁴ In this way, the Eucharist reveals the true meaning of God's creation fulfilled in Christ who makes all things new. As the Sacrament of the Church, the Eucharist reveals the power and the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world. By witnessing to Christ and His works, the Church receives her mission to sanctify, redeem, and transform the world through the Eucharist.⁵⁵ In the Eucharist, the Church fulfills her priestly nature of reconciling, sacrificing, and interceding for the whole world.⁵⁶ The Eucharist constitutes the Church as the Body of Christ and the presence and foretaste of the Kingdom in this world. Underlying Schmemmann's vision of the world is the eschatological reality holding all things together that he articulates in his vision of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Kingdom. As Schmemmann indicates, the Kingdom is "the source and content of Christian faith."⁵⁷ The Kingdom must be the ultimate referential for the Church in her mission to understand herself in relation to the world. The economy of God in and through the Incarnate *Logos* and the Holy Spirit inaugurates and fulfills the eschatological reality of

⁵² Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 33-34.

⁵³ Schmemmann, "The World As Sacrament," *Church, World, Mission: Reflections on Orthodoxy in the West*, 218.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ Schmemmann, "The Missionary Imperative," *ibid.*, 212-214.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

⁵⁷ Schmemmann, "The Problem of the Church's Presence in the World in Orthodox Consciousness," 9.

the Kingdom of God, making *theosis* possible.⁵⁸ In the Eucharist, Schmemmann posits that the Church ascends and enters into the heavenly banquet table in the Kingdom to encounter the living God. By its very nature, the Eucharist is eschatological because it communicates and reveals the ultimate Truth, the Kingdom of God. Therefore, the doctrine of deification informs Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision. As proven by Maximus, Christ is the center of all creation who holds together the *λογoi* of the created world. The created universe is included in God's plan for the participation of all creation: its deification, by the grace of the Incarnate *Logos* wherein the *λογoi* of all things abide.⁵⁹ Schmemmann's insistence on the cosmic nature of the Eucharist supports the Maximian claim that all things are created for fulfillment and union with God, the Cause and End of all existence. As Staniloae indicates, the Eucharist is the Sacrament that constitutes the Church as the *locus* of the salvation and deification of humanity. Through the divinizing grace of the Holy Spirit, the faithful participate in the mysteries and life of Christ that unite them to the divine life of the Triune God issuing forth from divine Trinitarian *perichoresis*.⁶⁰ For Schmemmann, the Eucharist makes the Church who She is, "the People of God, the Temple of the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, the gift and manifestation of the new life of the new age."⁶¹ The Eucharist communicates the new life in Christ that constitutes the Church, and the entire world, as a new creation.⁶² She becomes the "new being," who is "redeemed, renewed and transfigured"⁶³ by her union with the deified humanity of Christ in the Eucharist. Finally, Schmemmann regards the

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Thunberg, 82, 84.

⁶⁰ Bartos, 255.

⁶¹ Schmemmann, "Theology and Eucharist," 12.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 14-15.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 15.

Eucharist as the Sacrament of the Kingdom, the “food of immortality”⁶⁴ whereby the Church ascends to the Messianic Banquet and partakes of the eschatological fulfillment to come.⁶⁵ Schmemmann posits that the Eucharist transfigures the Church, renewing her in the glory and the joy of the presence of God.⁶⁶

Schmemmann grounds his sacramental theology in the Transfiguration of Christ on Mt. Tabor. He posits that the Church reflects the Taboric light in this world darkened by sin.⁶⁷ Therefore, the sacraments are the Church’s means of sanctifying, transforming and transfiguring the faithful through the salvific acts of Christ communicated by them.⁶⁸ Christ’s Transfiguration reveals the meaning of salvation. The divinity of Christ revealed in the Taboric light manifests the transformation that awaits those who, by grace, participate sacramentally in the mysteries of salvation. As Schmemmann indicates, the Transfiguration reveals the meaning of *theosis* and the destiny of humankind, “becoming divine by grace.”⁶⁹ Schmemmann adds that the sacraments reveal the destiny of all creation “that Christ might fill all things with Himself.”⁷⁰ He concludes that the sacraments are the means by which Christian life is transformed. Thus, he affirms the deifying character of the sacraments.

Christian deification is a gradual movement towards perfection in Christ that finds its fulfillment in the glory of the divine and eternal presence of God. Schmemmann’s

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 15, 19-20.

⁶⁷ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 83.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Liturgy of St. Basil; quoted in Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 90.

concept of the Divine Liturgy as a movement of passage and ascent parallels this *theosis* theme. As the celebrant blesses the assembled faithful with the solemn blessing of the Kingdom of God, the content and the goal of the liturgy is revealed and the “mystical procession”⁷¹ begins. The movement of passage from this world and ascent to the Kingdom of heaven is key to Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision. He argues that the Divine Liturgy is the realization of the Kingdom of God, the ascension of the Church with Christ, and the deification of all creation by participation in the deified humanity of Christ in the Eucharist.⁷² It is the perfect thanksgiving of Christ offered to and for the world as a participation in his sacrifice, his divinity and his victory over sin and death.⁷³ The Divine Liturgy is also the coming of the Holy Spirit who conveys Christ’s saving work to humankind so that they are in “the whole of [Christ’s] *movement* of deification,”⁷⁴ transformed, and made worthy to stand in the presence of divine glory and give thanks to God. As Schmemmann notes, this epitomizes the destiny and purpose of humanity as the “ultimate and total expression of [one’s] whole being...the Goal of all [one’s] goals, the Purpose of all [one’s] desires,...the Fulfillment of all [one’s] power and ...thirst for love.”⁷⁵ The Eucharist is the divine food that transforms God’s People into new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit and makes them partakers of divinity.⁷⁶

In the Eucharist, humanity is restored to knowledge of God and the world as a means of encounter with Him. As Schmemmann notes, the Eucharist manifests the divine

⁷¹ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, 42.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 56.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

love of the Father that permeates all of creation as a manifestation of His love.⁷⁷ The knowledge of God enjoyed by Adam and Eve in Paradise was indicative of the intimacy and constancy of their relationship with Him. The Eucharist restores that relationship of intimacy which was lost after the Fall, in the partaking of the divine love and life that restores fullness of knowledge. In the Eucharist, Christ reveals the truth about God and the world and the freedom of divine adoption. God created everything *ex nihilo* for abundant life in Him. This is the fullness of knowledge and freedom for the sons and daughters of God,⁷⁸ created and called to *theosis*, to share in divine nature.

Schmemmann also posits that the Eucharist reveals the meaning of the Last Supper and the Cross. In his view, the Last Supper completes and fulfills the purpose of creation because it is the manifestation and the gift of the Kingdom of God given in Christ's love. The Last Supper establishes the Eucharist as the sacrament that constitutes the Church as the presence of the Kingdom.⁷⁹ Divine love is also manifested by the Cross, the sign of the victory of the Kingdom of God over death.⁸⁰ As Schmemmann observes, the Cross is the "path"⁸¹ to the ascent of the Church into the Kingdom. Through its merits, humankind participates in immortality, incorruption and eternal life in communion with God and fulfillment in *theosis*.

Theosis in Western Eucharistic Theologies

From the title of his Eucharistic treatise, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, Marie-Vincent Bernadot, O.P., reveals his vision of the Eucharist that professes

⁷⁷ Schmemmann, *Our Father*, 22.

⁷⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 180-181.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 200-203.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 204-205.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 209.

the theological vision of the Eastern Fathers of the Church: the nature and destiny of the human person is union with the Triune God. The text opens the reader into the abyss of the transcendence of God, a theme so critical in the theological vision of St. Gregory of Nyssa. Bernadot describes the intertrinitarian life of God as a communication of the singular divinity to one another in a relationship of mutual abiding in infinite and inexhaustible love. The Eastern tradition, as has been noted, identifies this theological reality as divine Trinitarian *perichoresis*. Bernadot argues that God eternally desires to share this love with His creation in an eternal union with Him.⁸² Thus, divine love pours Itself into the “sacred humanity”⁸³ of the Incarnate Word so that humanity might realize [their] divine vocation. Bernadot describes the vocation to *theosis* in these terms: “by Jesus to enter into relations of intimacy with God our Father in the Holy Spirit, who is subsistent and eternal Love.”⁸⁴ In Bernadot’s view, deification is the ultimate fulfillment of humanity in the divine life of the Trinity that is accomplished through the Incarnation of the *Logos* and the deifying role of the Holy Spirit. Bernadot also posits that the Eucharist is the most efficacious means of entrance into divine trinitarian life.⁸⁵ Bernadot’s notes that the Eucharist offers humanity a share in divine likeness that leads to spiritual perfection. United to Christ, the faithful are transformed by His divinity and become true participants in the glory and joy of the Trinity.⁸⁶ Bernadot articulates the foundational belief of the Fathers, that God assumed human nature in order to deify humanity, in his declaration of “*From the Trinity to Communion,*” and “*From*

⁸² Bernadot, *From Holy Communion to the Blessed Trinity*, 48.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 6.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

*Communion to the Trinity.*⁸⁷ In these phrases, the Dominican describes the descent of the Divine Life of God in the Person of the Incarnate Word, and the ascent by which humanity enters into divine participation through Him. This is accomplished in the Eucharist, the manifestation of the fullness of divine love, which provides entrance into the “abyss of Divine Life.”⁸⁸ According to Bernadot, Eucharistic union is the most intimate of all human experiences that fills one with the fullness of the divine indwelling and participation in divine life. This, he adds, is accomplished by the grace of the Holy Spirit, “the artisan of [humanity’s] deification,”⁸⁹ who transforms the believer into an image of the Incarnate Word of God.⁹⁰ Bernadot’s Eucharistic vision is steeped in the conviction that Eucharistic communion is the viable and dynamic means for humankind to enter into participation in the divine life of the Trinity. The Eucharist is the intimate encounter with the Incarnate Word of God that makes the soul a dwelling place for the Triune God. This eschatological encounter with divinity is a foretaste of the fulfillment of divine participation that is promised in the Kingdom of heaven. Bernadot’s Eucharistic treatise, therefore, does advance the deifying role of the Eucharist in the Western Christian Church of the early twentieth century.

In his Eucharistic treatise, *L’Eucharistie: Pâque de l’Église*, Jean-Marie Roger Tillard, O.P. posits the Eucharist as the sacrament that brings salvation. Tillard argues that true Eucharistic understanding finds its source in the soteriological view that salvation is a “*passage* from the world of sin into the world of God.”⁹¹ This theme

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 109.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 110.

⁹¹ Tillard, *The Eucharist: Pasch of God’s People*, 20.

echoes Schmemmann's understanding of the Eucharist as the movement of passage from this fallen world and ascent into the Kingdom of God. Tillard submits that salvation is accomplished in two movements, a theological perspective that lends support to the thesis that the Eucharist is the means of *theosis*. The first moment of salvation is the purifying effect of the Eucharist that redeems humankind from sin and death. Tillard posits that the second moment of salvation directs the faithful into the fullness of communion of life in the "agape of God."⁹² Tillard builds his argument on the Eucharistic vision of the Fathers. Ignatius of Antioch, Cyril of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nyssa help to formulate the first moment in Tillard's theory. Ignatius' medicinal approach to the Eucharist highlights the gift of incorruptibility that is rendered by the deified body of Christ.⁹³ Cyril notes the divinizing role of Christ's body in the Eucharist that grants immortality to those who receive Him.⁹⁴ Gregory finds the Eucharist to be the bread of divinization that cures and grants immortality.⁹⁵ Tillard discovers evidence to support the second moment of salvation imparted by the Eucharist in the writings of Irenaeus. Gregory of Nyssa, and Theodore of Mopsuestia. Irenaeus posits that the seed of incorruptibility is planted in the soul by the heavenly food that promises a share in Christ's resurrection.⁹⁶ Gregory submits that the immortal, incorruptible, deified flesh of the divine *Logos* is communicated to those who partake of the Eucharist, which, in turn, deifies them.⁹⁷ Theodore proffers a pneumatological aspect, suggesting that the grace of the Holy Spirit transforms and unites those who eat the heavenly food of the Eucharist.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 400.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 152-153.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 156.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 229-230.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 240.

Through this “food of immortality,”⁹⁸ the faithful are nourished with the eschatological hope of the fullness of life that awaits them after the resurrection of the body.⁹⁹ As Tillard notes, the fullness of life imparted by Christ in the Eucharist is a communion in the fullness of the life of the indwelling Trinity. His Eucharistic vision is one that offers considerable evidence in support of the sacramental dimension of the doctrine of the Eucharist. The Eucharist is the divine food of immortality that promises incorruptibility, and eternal life to those who partake of it. Communion in the deified Body of Christ is the passage from the bonds of sin and death to life in the fullness of communion with God.

Inferential Arguments

Evidence in Support of the Thesis

Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision reflects the theology of deification so intrinsic to Eastern Christian tradition. It is a personalist, relational theology of participation that is communicated in the sacramental life of the Church, especially in Baptism and Eucharist. Schmemmann’s Eucharistic theology is consistently trinitarian and capable of balancing the christological and pneumatological dimensions that are so critical to the doctrine of *theosis*. “Christ the Eucharist is the ‘breakthrough,’”¹⁰⁰ notes Schmemmann, who raises the Church to the table in the Kingdom to eat the divine food.¹⁰¹ The Holy Spirit “*seals and confirms*”¹⁰² this ascent and transforms the Church into the “new time”¹⁰³ of the Kingdom. Schmemmann’s Eucharistic theology is based on a sacramental approach that is

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 243.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 39.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 44.

¹⁰³ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 219.

rooted in the patristic understanding of the symbol. Schmemmann argues that the sacramental symbol makes present and communicates what is unknowable and invisible to human nature. Therefore, in the Eucharist, the symbols of bread and wine are the manifestation and communication of the true Body and Blood and divinity of the Incarnate Word. Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology reveals the Eastern Christian conviction of the sacramental nature of the world and opposes any theory suggesting that the sacraments are a unique institution unrelated to the world's sacramentality.¹⁰⁴ This theological orientation frames the cosmic dimension of Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision, positing the deification of the whole of creation. It also supports his argument that the Eucharist reveals the only true relationship that humankind must have with God, the world and one another. This realization has its origins in the Eucharistic vision of the early Church that held together the world, the Church and the Kingdom in a unified synthesis.¹⁰⁵ The human person's true identity as *homo adorans* reaches its fulfillment in the Eucharist as the Christian stands in love and adoration before God to offer [himself/herself] with creation in the lifting up of the Eucharistic bread and wine.

Schmemmann argues that *theosis* is the fulfillment of the *homo adorans*. He writes:

For it is only in worship that [the human person] has the source and the possibility of that knowledge which is communion, and of that communion that fulfills itself as true knowledge: knowledge of God and therefore knowledge of the world—communion with God and therefore communion with all that exists.¹⁰⁶

Schmemmann builds his theological anthropology on the kingly and priestly nature of the human person created in God's image. He adds that those who are baptized in the new

¹⁰⁴ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 140.

¹⁰⁵ Fisch, "Schmemmann's Theological Contribution to the Liturgical Renewal of the Churches," 8.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 120.

life of Christ and the Holy Spirit are anointed in Christ's Kingly, Priestly, and Prophetic nature, and called to share in the sanctification and transformation of all created existence. This evidence is consistent with the teaching of the Fathers that posits the role of Baptism and Eucharist in the deification of humanity and the world. The anaphoral prayer of the Divine Liturgy articulates the vocation of the "priesthood of believers:"¹⁰⁷ to bless, to praise, to give thanks, and to worship the ineffable God. It is the central act of the *homo adorans* that constitutes [his/her] life as Eucharistic¹⁰⁸ and gives witness to the Kingdom as the content of Christian life.

Schmemmann's predominantly eschatological approach to the Eucharist reflects his conviction that all creation is indeed redeemed, sanctified and transformed because of the Incarnation of the *Logos*, and made ready for its final glorification or *theosis*. For this reason, Schmemmann sees the need to restore the eschatological dimension of Eucharistic and ecclesial theology so that life itself will always move in the direction of the Kingdom of God. Clearly, Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision incorporates the fundamental theological vision of the early Fathers that asserts humanity's vocation to *theosis*. It is also apparent that the doctrine has informed and enhanced Schmemmann's Eucharistic articulation. Schmemmann's contribution to liturgical theology leads him to conclude that the liturgy is the "*locus theologicus par excellence*."¹⁰⁹ It is a theological orientation reflecting the patristic conviction that the liturgical experience is the source and "ultimate criterion"¹¹⁰ of theology: *Lex orandi est lex credendi*. Based on this conviction,

¹⁰⁷ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ Schmemmann, "Theology and Liturgical Tradition," 12.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

Schmemmann advanced a Christian vision of life that would serve to illuminate the eschatological and ecclesiological dimensions of deification present in the Eucharist. The liturgy as the source of belief reveals the scriptural and patristic influences that constitute the liturgical tradition of the Church. It is the act of the Church that expresses her true essence as the manifestation of the Kingdom of God in this world.¹¹¹

Schmemmann posits Baptism and Eucharist as the foundational acts of the Church that are the “means”¹¹² of the eschatological reality in the Church. Theology is made possible because of the sacramental liturgy that brings forth the new life in Christ in the Holy Spirit and actualizes the Church as the Body of Christ and the “visible sign”¹¹³ of the coming age of the Kingdom of God.¹¹⁴ Therefore, the Eucharistic experience of the Church, the act that defines and actualizes her identity, is the new life that transports the Church into the eschatological reality shaping her vision of life.¹¹⁵

In Schmemmann’s development of the cosmic, ecclesial, and eschatological character of the Eucharist, there is commanding evidence in support of the thesis that the doctrine of *theosis* informs, enhances and illuminates his Eucharistic vision. He, himself, identified the Eucharist as the “sacrament of deification”¹¹⁶ in a collection of essays and lectures used in Orthodox catechesis. Although Eucharistic categorizations were common to theologians of both traditions at the time, Schmemmann discovered in this methodological tool, a means of positing the holistic nature of the Divine Liturgy as well

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 14, 17.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

¹¹⁶ Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development Through Liturgical Experience*, 21.

as a medium to articulate the nature of the Eucharist. This tool provided sound evidence in support of the supposition that *theosis* themes are intrinsically interwoven in Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology.

Areas Lacking in Support of the Thesis

According to Meyendorff, although Schmemmann was a "brilliant man and intuitive thinker,"¹¹⁷ as a pastoral theologian, his work, while scholarly, was seemingly more intuitive than systematic. Meyendorff also notes that Schmemmann had a gift for reaching to the heart of the matter and arriving at conclusions that were theologically sound. Nevertheless, historical arguments based on historical research are often missing in some areas of his work.¹¹⁸ Schmemmann frequently refers to the Fathers in his Eucharistic explications. However, rarely does he identify them or, in the few cases where he does, there is little or no development of their theological contributions in dialogue with his own thought. They are usually quotes used in support of his thesis. This does not, however, deter from the patristic foundation of his work. Given the frequency with which Schmemmann refers to the Fathers or the patristic spirit, more historical evidence to build his arguments would augment his Eucharistic vision. It would also enhance the deifying character of his Eucharistic vision, given the patristic rootedness in *theosis*.

The question of the need for further historical research can also be applied to Schmemmann's liturgical theology. Undeniably, Schmemmann found his source for the whole of his theology and his life in the liturgical experience of the Church. Meyendorff

¹¹⁷ Dr. Paul Meyendorff, interview by author, 4 May, 2006.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

testifies that the Divine Liturgy was for Fr. Alexander the “foretaste of the Kingdom.”¹¹⁹ This was visibly apparent in the way he celebrated the liturgy, notes Meyendorff. “He really experienced it and transmitted it to others,”¹²⁰ remarks Meyendorff. During the anamnesis, Fr. Alexander seemed “to make the past, the present, and the future, present in the here and now,”¹²¹ he adds. Clearly, this demonstrates the keen theological insights that are exhibited in Schmemmann’s Eucharistic theology. However, it does not negate the possibility that further historical evidence regarding the liturgical tradition of the early Church would contribute to Schmemmann’s convincing argument of the interdependent relationship of the Eucharist, the *ecclesia*, and the eighth day. In addition, the dogmatic content of the mystagogical catecheses of the early Fathers would lend support to Schmemmann’s ecclesial and eschatological convictions regarding the Eucharist as the center of the Christian worldview. Furthermore, tracing the historical development of the liturgical texts would enhance Schmemmann’s presentation of the Eucharist as a movement of passage and ascent. The theme of ascent, as found in Maximus the Confessor, would offer assistance here. Research into the anaphoras of the early Church would be especially helpful in Schmemmann’s exposition of the Eucharist as the “Sacrament of the Anaphora.”¹²² From a systematic perspective, more detailed evidence in support of the deifying character of the Eucharist would surface as a result of research in the areas mentioned above. From the perspective of mystical theology and the liturgical experience, it is plausible that Fr. Alexander had no need for further rational discourse in these matters given his priestly, liturgical experiences.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

¹²² Schmemmann, 159.

Contributions of the Investigation

Based on the results of this study, the following section will submit the contributions that this investigation can offer to the theological community. These questions will frame the content of the evaluation: “Is the study valuable?”; “Does the study engage with contemporary problems?”; “Does the study provide a vision to live by?”; “Can its contents be preached?”; and, “Is the study believable?”¹²³ “Is the investigation valuable?”¹²⁴

The doctrine of salvation touches the lives and the destiny of every human person. The answers to the critical questions of human nature and human destiny raised by soteriology are found in the Christian doctrine of *theosis*. As the foundational articulation of the theological vision of the Greek Fathers of the early Church, *theosis* reveals to humankind the nature and purpose of all created existence: participation in the divine life of God in an eternal communion of love. It is also the articulation of the vocation of humankind as the priest, prophet and king of this world, responsible for the sanctification and transformation of all creation to be offered back to God. The doctrine of *theosis* embraces all that is meaningful, all that is needful, and all that is desired by humankind. The value of its teaching is universal.

This study has also shown the need for the retrieval of the spirit of the early Christian Church in order to posit an authentic ecclesial identity that seeks the salvation and deification of the world. Having examined the work of several of the early Fathers of the Church, it is clear that the teachings of the Fathers ground Christians in the creedal confession that proclaims the profound mysteries of faith. Their vision points the Church

¹²³ Brian Davies, O.P., *The Neo-Thomists*, v.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

in the direction of the Triune God and the Kingdom of heaven by way of the sacraments. The Greek Fathers, in particular, construct their theological vision of *theosis* with the certitude that all creation is called to share in divine life. It is a belief that permeates every aspect of their theology. The Fathers argue that the Church is the *locus* where the sanctification and transformation of the human person occur. Through the sacraments, especially Baptism and Eucharist, the faithful receive a new identity, claimed by Christ in the Holy Spirit, and nurtured in their vocation to *theosis*. To recapture the spirit of the early Church as articulated by the Fathers, is to return to one's baptismal commitment rooted in the confession of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. It is to reclaim that new life in Christ and the Holy Spirit that imparts a new identity and an anointment as a holy, royal, and priestly people of God. The spirit of the early Church was, above all, Eucharistic. In their gatherings to share at the table of the Lord, they were united in their confession of faith in the Risen Christ, in their hope for the salvation that He promised, and in the love of the Holy Spirit that held them together and sent them out as witnesses of this message to the world. They understood that the purpose and meaning of life came together in the Eucharist: who they were called to be as Church, what they were to do for the world, and how all things must be oriented to the Kingdom. This is the spirit and the vision articulated so well by Father Alexander. The Church is the presence of the Kingdom of God in this world that is realized in the gathering of the faithful at the Lord's table to share in the Eucharistic meal.

It is the hope of this writer, however, that the most valuable contribution of this study has been made to the universal Church that suffers from internal divisions. In the spirit of Father Alexander, whom John Meyendorff argues has "always lived in a wider

spiritual world,”¹²⁵ this writer posits that the doctrine of *theosis* can offer a viable point of departure for Christian reconciliation, especially in sacramental theology. *Theosis* is a theological and spiritual treasure that deserves to be shared with all Christian traditions. Indeed, the treasures claimed by any Christian tradition, if founded in the Truth, could only enrich the whole Body and serve to illuminate the mysteries that speak to every heart. *Theosis* is not a theological rumination to be feared or evaded, nor is it an experience reserved solely for mystics. *Theosis* is the call to the spirit of every human person to transformation and transfiguration in the glory of God. *Theosis* reaches into every dimension of the doctrine of God like a theological compass guiding the way to the Kingdom of God. The wealth of this teaching has informed Eastern Christianity from the early centuries of the Church. As evidenced by this study, *theosis* has informed, enhanced and illuminated Eucharistic understanding, especially the Eucharistic vision of Alexander Schmemmann. Theology done in the spirit of the Fathers must be attentive the implications of the doctrine of *theosis*.

“Does the Study Engage with Contemporary Problems?”¹²⁶

The need for this study was urged on by Schmemmann’s claim that the Christian Church was in the midst of a Eucharistic crisis.¹²⁷ He argued for a rediscovery of the connection between the liturgical experience of the Church and how that experience is lived and understood by Christians. Schmemmann observed that Christians were suffering from a lack of liturgical consciousness, a disposition that he argued was stimulated by the

¹²⁵ Meyendorff, “A Life Worth Living,” 149.

¹²⁶ Davies, v.

¹²⁷ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 9.

growing climate of secularism.¹²⁸ According to Schmemmann, secularism is the negation of the nature of the human person as *homo adorans*. Humankind, not God, becomes the measure of all things.¹²⁹ To the secularist, the world loses its meaning as the manifestation of God's presence, and is reduced to an object intended solely for human satisfaction. Secularism strikes at the heart of the meaning and purpose of creation and of life itself. It gives rise to a myriad of expressions of emptiness and self-absorption: dissatisfaction, depression, suicide, greed, and consumerism. When the human person finds no need to worship God, [he/she] begins to worship the idols of power, inordinate passions, and pride. The formative grace of the liturgical experience is unable to reach into the human heart and soul that refuses its entrance. Its fruits of forgiveness, humility, love, and service to others cannot be savored. Without a Eucharistic vision that sees Christ as the Life of life, humanity lives in the darkness of disregard for the value of life itself. Consequently, humankind takes upon themselves the right to dispose of life as they choose, giving rise to all forms of hatred and oppression, violence, unjust wars, murder, abortion, and capital punishment. Without God and His Kingdom as the ultimate term of reference, the human person fails to fulfill [his/her] nature as a worshipping human being who is called to become like God and to participate in His divine glory.

Schmemmann claims that the Christian Church suffers from the effects of secularism because its people have lost sight of the vision of the early Church Fathers: *theosis*, the theological vision that formed the Christian view of life, the human person, and the world. This vision was formed and sustained within the Church's liturgical experience where the faithful were informed of their cosmic, ecclesial, and eschatological

¹²⁸ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 7.

¹²⁹ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 10.

vocation to sanctify and transform all life in God. Schmemmann posits that the failure of Christians to identify and fulfill their call to *theosis*, and to manifest the Kingdom of God in this world, is a result of a Eucharistic crisis that prevents them from living the vision of the early Fathers. Thus, understanding the intrinsic link between the Eucharist and humanity's vocation to *theosis* is obstructed by liturgical indifference. The result is the inability of Christians to connect the ecclesial and liturgical experience of the Eucharist with the rest of life, and the subsequent failure of Christians to sanctify and transform the world.

The results of this investigation support the need to return to the spirit and vision of the early Fathers that was so enlightened by the deifying character of the Eucharist. Through this vision, Christians realized their priestly and kingly nature and were able to refer and to lift up everything to God, convinced of the eschatological character of all things. The evidence proffered by this study also points to the need to rediscover the Eucharist in its cosmic, ecclesial, and eschatological dimensions, so that, as Schmemmann suggests, Christians are in right relationship with the world, with each other, and with God. Empowered by a renewed identity as the Sacrament of the Kingdom of God, the Church will be revitalized in her mission to sanctify, to transform and to save the whole world. Christians will reclaim their true identity as worshipping persons who are sent as witnesses to the saving mysteries of Christ. The liturgical experience of the Church will once again become the source and the reference point of life.

“Does the Study Provide a Vision to Live By?”¹³⁰

The Eucharistic vision of Alexander Schmemmann affirms that the quintessential act that determines an authentic Christian approach to life and to the world is the Eucharistic experience of the Church. In the liturgy, true ecclesial and Christian identity is revealed. The human person is called to worship God in the spirit of the *homo adorans*, called to *theosis*, who is given the dignified vocation to participate in eternal communion with God. This vocation shapes and guides the whole of life in the direction of the Kingdom of God. The Eucharist manifests the sacramentality of the world, given to humankind as the gift and the means of communion with God. The Eucharist also reveals that God has called all of humanity as a corporate community in the Holy Spirit, the Body of Christ, to participate in his divine life. The Eucharist, as the foretaste of the Kingdom to come, is a constant reminder of the true *telos* of all creation: to share in the glory of God. The Eucharist is the means of grace whereby the Christian is perfected in the divine attributes and empowered to transform this fallen world into a world that manifests the Kingdom of God. It is a noble and viable vision that can and must be preached to all generations. It is a vision based on the Eternal Plan of God that intends the deification of all creation. Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision is formed by the Scriptures, the teachings of the Fathers of the Church, and the liturgical tradition of the Church guided by the Holy Spirit. It is believable because it begins and ends in the Triune God, the Ultimate Truth. According to Schmemmann, the Eucharist is more than a vision for life, it is the “life of life itself.”¹³¹ Christ the Eucharist, is “divine love made

¹³⁰ Davies, v.

¹³¹ Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 13.

food, made life for [humankind]” and for the world.¹³² Christ is the Archetype of the perfection of human nature and the True Vision of Life given as food to the world. In the Eucharist, Christ as human is the means for humankind to become Christ as God and to realize deification.

Theological Implications of the Study

The evidence in support of the thesis of this investigation promises to enhance theological understanding in other arenas. As has been noted, Schmemmann’s vision of the Eucharist as the Sacrament of Deification taps into liturgical theology, christology, pneumatology, theological anthropology, patrology, soteriology, trinitarian theology, and sacramentology. Undeniably, a convincing case could be made in each of these theological disciplines to uncover the implications that a Eucharistic theology rooted in the doctrine of *theosis* can effect. This section, however, will be limited to the implications of the study for moral theology, a theological vision for the earth, women in Church ministries, and liturgical worship. They are posited as areas of confusion, ignorance and uncertainty that present themselves in need of the theological dialogue and engagement that the results of the study can offer.

Moral Theology

As O’Keefe indicates, *theosis* is a “unifying principle for theology, ethics and spirituality...in the Eastern Christian tradition.”¹³³ Undoubtedly, this factor accounts for the lack of published materials in Eastern Christian ethics. Orthodox theologian, Stanley S. Harakas, argues that Church doctrine and ethics can be distinguished, but not

¹³² *Ibid.*, 14.

¹³³ Mark O’Keefe, O.S.B., *Becoming Good, Becoming Holy: On the Relationship of Christian Ethics and Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 64.

separated.¹³⁴ This thinking, as O’Keefe suggests, demonstrates the cohesive nature of dogmatics and ethics in Eastern Christian thought and reflects the unifying property of *theosis*.¹³⁵

Roman Catholicism, on the other hand, boasts of a systematic, distinct and well-developed moral theology dating from the 16th and 17th centuries.¹³⁶ According to O’Keefe, moral theology, as a theological specialization, began to separate from its theological roots articulated by St. Thomas Aquinas in the *Summa Theologiae*.¹³⁷ According to Thomistic thought, all of Christian life is ordered toward the attainment of union with God. Therefore, the moral and spiritual aspects of life are in harmony as the human person grows in the practice of virtue in order to avoid sin and attain union with God. Thomas also proffers the need for the grace of the sacramental life of the Church accompanied by a life of prayer. Thomas’ view demonstrates the synthesis between the moral and spiritual life of the Christian¹³⁸ that is intrinsic to Eastern Christian thought. Gradually, moral theology as known in the Western tradition, distanced itself from Thomas’ teaching on beatitude and on God as the ultimate end, to focus on sinful acts that were contrary to virtue, Church laws, and casuistry.¹³⁹ As O’Keefe notes, moral theology, intended for the laity, was concerned with keeping the commandments and

¹³⁴ Stanley S. Harakas, *Toward Transfigured Life: The Theoria of Eastern Orthodox Ethics* (Minneapolis: Light & Life Publishing Co., 1983), 1-2; quoted in Vigen Guroian, *Incarnate Love: Essays in Orthodox Ethics* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1987), 2.

¹³⁵ O’Keefe, 60.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 58.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 13, 59.

avoiding sin, while spiritual theology addressed the needs of the spiritual elite who were called to a life of prayer and holiness.¹⁴⁰ According to Guroian:

Roman Catholicism came to America with a distinct moral theology, based on the natural moral law, specified under the practice of the sacrament of penance, developed by the canon lawyers, and applied in a juridical fashion consistent with that church's definition of itself as priestly authority.¹⁴¹

These factors, which permeated moral reasoning, were manifested in manuals of moral theology from the early 17th century until the Second Vatican Council. As O'Keefe suggests, the moral life of Christians in relationship to union with God, was replaced by manuals about precepts and human actions.¹⁴²

William Spohn submits that contemporary Christian ethics has moved from a theology of rules to an ethic that is formed by the illuminating narrative in the Scriptures, a response to God's gifts of love by following Christ in authentic discipleship, and by "compassionate identification with [one's] neighbor."¹⁴³ There is a more humanistic approach to moral theology that stresses the importance of imitating Christ and appropriating his works in the world. This thinking has opened the way for liberation theologies that seek to respond to the moral question, "What must I do to free the oppressed?"¹⁴⁴ Contemporary social issues have triggered a response from the community of moral theologians in the areas of social sin and social injustice, medical ethics, liberation theology, gender issues, and sexuality. Spohn posits the formative

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14, 59.

¹⁴¹ Guroian, 2.

¹⁴² O'Keefe, 59.

¹⁴³ William C. Spohn, *What Are They Saying About Scripture and Ethics?* (New York: Paulist Press, 1995), 124.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 56.

power of Scripture in shaping Christian identity. He points to the liturgy, which is so scripturally based, as a means of enhancing Christian virtue.¹⁴⁵

Christian morality is ultimately the path to and the attainment of salvation and union with God. It incorporates a life lived in loving response to God's gift of love in the Person of Jesus Christ who makes union with God a possibility. Therefore, a moral imperative is intrinsically inherent in the Incarnation of the Word, the Archetype of perfected humanity.¹⁴⁶ Genuine Christian life must be conformed to Christ through participation in His new life given in the Holy Spirit and transmitted through the sacramental life of the Church.¹⁴⁷ Christian moral theology is offered a rich means of retrieving its theological and spiritual roots in the doctrine of *theosis*. More significantly, moral theology placed in dialogue with the deifying nature of the Eucharist, satisfies the twofold response of gratitude to God for the gift of divine participation. According to Bernard Haring, worship and moral living constitute the Christian response of gratitude. He posits that authentic Christian formation is rooted in the communal celebration of the Eucharist and personal prayer.¹⁴⁸ The truly grateful and loving human response for the gift of God given in the Eucharist and the indwelling of the Trinity, is to reflect that inner divine presence through right moral living. As O'Keefe indicates, "The Christian moral life, then, is not in the first instance about duty and law but about *gratitude and the loving response* to love and life offered."¹⁴⁹ Eastern Christian theology maintains that Christian moral living is a constant growth in the divine likeness that is appropriated through the

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 114-116.

¹⁴⁶ Guroian, 15.

¹⁴⁷ O'Keefe, 71.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 69.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

liturgical and sacramental experience of the Church, especially in the Eucharist. The divine life of Christ enters the faithful, transforming them by grace into His own image, uniting them with God through deification.¹⁵⁰

Other findings of this study address the heart of moral theology. Humanity's creation in the image of God and the restoration of the image through the Incarnation offer input into the conversation about goodness, free will, grace, conscience and moral responsibility. Creation in divine likeness necessitates discussion about the vocation to *theosis*, the life of virtue and divine grace. More significantly, it opens the doors to reflection on love as the supreme virtue, the *agape* of the Triune God that is shared with humankind in the Person of the Incarnate Word, in His death, resurrection, and ascension.¹⁵¹ Love is at the heart of the Eastern Christian doctrines explored throughout this study: the Trinity, Creation, the Incarnation, Resurrection and Transfiguration of Christ, and the doctrine of *theosis*. Finally, Christian morality is soteriological and looks toward union with God as its end. Clearly, it has been proven that the Eucharistic theology of Alexander Schmemmann provides an eschatological vision that shapes and motivates Christian life.

The engagement of Christian moral theology with the Eastern Christian doctrine of *theosis* as it is appropriated in the sacrament of the Eucharist promises valuable insights for a theology of Christian ethics. Appreciating the goodness of the human person from the doctrine of creation in the image and likeness of God can dispel the negativity and the guilt so often experienced by Western Catholics formed in the faith before the Second Vatican Council. The doctrine of *theosis* generates reflection on the

¹⁵⁰ Guroian, 16-17.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 16-18.

dignity and the worthiness of the human person to be called in love to participate in the goodness of God eternally. As O'Keefe indicates, *theosis* is the actualization of humankind created in the image of God. It also reorients reflection on human behavior as a response of gratitude and love rightfully due to God for the gift of sharing in His life in this world and the next. Schmemmann's way of articulating his Eastern Christian vision of the sacramentality of the world challenges one to become more accountable for the wise use of the goods of this world that are given to humanity as a manifestation of God's presence. It also serves as a reminder to Christians of their priestly role to transfigure the world by filling it with God. Moral theology will also benefit from Schmemmann's liturgical vision that roots Christian formation in the Eucharistic liturgy. Finally, Schmemmann's vision illuminates the vocation to all humanity to become persons whose lives are filled with thanksgiving and become a constant offering in love; persons who are Eucharistic. This is the true model of moral living inclined toward communion with God in this life and in the Kingdom of God.

A Theological Vision for the Earth

The twenty-first century is faced with cosmic challenges that surpass those of a century ago. According to Santmire, toxic pollution of the air and water, erosion of the earth's soil, deforestation, nuclear fallouts, global warming, and the threat of thermonuclear annihilation have instilled a sense of fear and hopelessness about the future of the world.¹⁵² He argues:

In this time of increasing despair about the future of our species, and the future of our cosmos as a whole, the Church needs a theological vision of the future that is

¹⁵² H. Paul Santmire, "The Future of the Cosmos and the Renewal of the Church's Life With Nature," *Cosmos as Creation: Theology and Science in Consonance*, ed., Ted Peters (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1989), 266-267.

larger and deeper than the hopelessness of our souls.¹⁵³

The theological vision posited by Santmire is one of hope that surges forth from the Scriptures and embraces the temporal, universal and holistic elements of reality. All things are from God and ultimately glorify Him (Rom 11:36); Christ reigns in a history that will be consummated (1 Cor. 15:25-28); and this heaven and earth will pass away making way for a new heaven and a new earth. (Rev. 21:1-2)¹⁵⁴ Reality is God's history that concerns humanity and the cosmos on the journey to the new heaven and new earth. God's presence permeates the world and serves as a reminder of the glory to come in the new city of God.¹⁵⁵ This vision is a reminder to the Church of the new millennium of her priestly, kingly, and prophetic vocation and mission to sanctify and transform the earth in preparation for its final consummation in God.

Having exposed the cosmic theology of Dumitru Staniloae and Schmemmann's sacramental vision of the world, this investigation has found considerable evidence in support of the argument that God intends the deification of the entire cosmos as well as humankind; a truth that restores meaning and purpose to the world outside of human designs. As an eschatological reality, this truth also renews humanity's hope in God's eternal plan to bring His creation to perfection in His glory. Schmemmann's cosmic vision, which posits the natural continuity of the sacraments with creation, is proof that the Church can offer a theological vision that responds to the hopelessness and indifference that erodes human efforts to save, preserve, and sanctify the world. Within Schmemmann's Baptismal theology, one discovers the theological significance of humanity's priestly,

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 267.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 268-269.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 269.

kingly, and prophetic nature, particularly as it relates to the world. His Eucharistic theology posits the sanctity of creation that is filled with Christ, and mandates a renewed sense of respect for the world. Schmemmann also emphasizes the Christian responsibility to work in solidarity with others to share the goods of the earth that human hands bless with their work. Staniloae's creation theology reveals the world as the gift of God to humanity that is intended for communion and dialogue with Him. It is a vision that instills in the human heart a sense of wonder that leads to prayerful reflection of the glory of God permeating the world.¹⁵⁶ Both approaches suggest the need for humanity to rekindle its natural relationship with the earth. Formed out of the earth to return to it until the resurrection on the last day, the human person mediates the deification of the world.

Women in Church Ministries

Theologically, the sacred tradition of Orthodoxy offers a model of ministry for the universal Church. As Prassas indicates, the Orthodox tradition recognizes the dignity and equality of every person. It refutes models of ministry that encourage a climate of superiority for the elect and inferiority for the follower. Rooted in the conviction that all are called to holiness, Orthodoxy encourages the contributions of all its members, male and female, to the building up of the Kingdom in this world.¹⁵⁷ In theory, these teachings are shared by many religious traditions.¹⁵⁸ In practice, however, women are often relegated by "patriarchal values"¹⁵⁹ that are so commonly ingrained in cultures, societies

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 280.

¹⁵⁷ Despina D. Prassas, "Varieties of Gifts: Women's Ministries in the Contemporary Church," *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the 'Signs of the Times,'* ed. Kyriaki Karidoyanes FitzGerald (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 45.

¹⁵⁸ Marie Assaad, "Defining Ourselves as Orthodox Women," *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the 'Signs of the Times,'* 156.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

and human relationships. According to Prassas, the Orthodox tradition supports the theoretical understanding of women in Church ministries.¹⁶⁰

Prassas grounds her argument on the three fundamental teachings of Orthodoxy: 1) human creation in the image and likeness of God; 2) the doctrine of *theosis*; and 3) the role of the Holy Spirit in the Church.¹⁶¹ These themes have framed the argument of the investigation and offer a theological perspective from which to dialogue about women in Church ministries. Each of them assert the dignity of the human person, called to share in the life of the Triune God, regardless of race, religion, age, ethnic, economic or educational background, and/or gender. The doctrine of the Incarnation affirms that this dignity permeates the whole person, body and soul. There is no room for sexism in the Body of Christ. As Fitzgerald notes, “Sexism...seeks to undermine the sense of personhood of the...individual by aiming to break the person’s will and sense of God-given dignity.”¹⁶² God invites all of His people to the heavenly banquet table. For this purpose, He created the human person in the divine image and clothed [him/her] in a garment of splendor, suitable for the heavenly feast. The Eastern Christian tradition upholds the belief that all persons are called to union with God and participation in His divine life. The doctrine of *theosis* recognizes that each human being is called to holiness by living a life worthy of this privileged vocation. Growth in *theosis* is not possible for those who stubbornly refuse to acknowledge the inherent and divine dignity of the other by sexist behavior. Patriarchal attitudes in the Church manifest sexist tendencies that

¹⁶⁰ Prassas, 45.

¹⁶¹ Assasad, 156.

¹⁶² Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald, “Sexism as Sin: Essential Spiritual Considerations,” *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the ‘Signs of the Times,’* 196.

seek to “subdue and enslave the other.”¹⁶³ Schmemmann’s baptismal theology, which identifies the kingly, priestly and prophetic role of each baptized Christian, asserts that humanity’s kingly role must not be understood as domination. Rather, it is the kingship of Christ that liberates humankind from the evils of this world that obstruct the vision of the Kingdom of God.¹⁶⁴ Authentic kingship demands that all persons work together for the good of the Kingdom, regardless of gender. As priest, [he/she] is called to be the mediator between God and the world, sanctifying it by [his/her] very existence as *homo adorans*.¹⁶⁵ Anointed as prophet, the human person is empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness to the Wisdom of God as [he/she] hears His Word by proclaiming God’s Truth and His will to the world.¹⁶⁶ The Spirit of God empowers each person with unique ministries to make Christ present in this world. Each is called to minister to the community according to [his/her] specific gifts imparted by the Spirit. In this way, the Spirit works in the Church through men and women for the salvation and deification of the world.¹⁶⁷ The trinitarian nature of Eastern Christian theology offers profound insights into the meaning of authentic human relationships and models shared life and ministry in the divine *perichoresis*.

According to Prassas, many types of ministries were assumed by women in the early Church.¹⁶⁸ A closer look at the history of the early Church reveals Pauline references to women deacons. Fitzgerald adds that in the Christian East, women deacons

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 195.

¹⁶⁴ Schmemmann, *Of Water and the Spirit*, 93.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 94-97.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 100.

¹⁶⁷ Prassas, 46.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

were active in the Church until the Middle Ages.¹⁶⁹ While she argues that the order was discouraged in the West, she claims that the work of women deacons was assumed by widows and nuns in the Church of the West.¹⁷⁰ Paul's reference to the ministry of Phoebe (*diakonos*)¹⁷¹ earned her the title of the "prototype for female deacons."¹⁷² According to Fitzgerald, Clement of Alexandria, Origen, St. John Chrysostom, and Theodoret affirm the presence of women deacons in the Church in their writings. Further evidence has been found on tombstone epitaphs of the 5th century. Non-Christian sources have been found which document the capture and torture of two female "*ministrae*"¹⁷³ believed by Pliny to have a direct leadership role in Christian worship.¹⁷⁴ Prassas also identifies other ministries assumed by women in the early Church: the disciples, Mary and Martha; the apostles, Mary Magdalene, Junia, Prisca, Apphia, Nyumpha, Mariamne, Fotini and Thecla; the prophetess, Anna; defender of the faith, Theodora; and the woman convener of the Council of Nicea (787), Empress Irene.¹⁷⁵ From an historical perspective, therefore, it is evident that the Holy Spirit continued to inspire and empower both men and women in the common ministry of the Church. Sharing in the redemptive, sanctifying and deifying work of Christ, the first Christians embraced the common priesthood of all believers as the fulfillment of their worthy vocation to *theosis*.

¹⁶⁹ Kyriaki Karidoyanes Fitzgerald, "Women Deacons: A Brief Review of Ancient Evidence," *Orthodox Women Speak: Discerning the 'Signs of the Times,'* (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 1999), 161.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 164-165.

¹⁷⁵ Prassas, 50, n.6.

Liturgical Worship

Schmemmann's Eucharistic vision is an invitation to the Christian Church of the Western tradition to fan into flame the ecclesial spirit of the Fathers whose entire lives were liturgical. Above all else, the first Christians lived the faith in the liturgical life of the Church, celebrating and participating in the mysteries of Christ year round. Deeds accomplished in service to the Church made all life liturgical.¹⁷⁶ Taft observes how Eastern Christians have remained faithful to the patristic spirit. He notes, "The Eastern Church is before all else a Church that keeps vigil before God, celebrating the mysteries of his Son in the age-old rites passed on by the Fathers in the faith."¹⁷⁷ Indeed, Schmemmann's liturgical insights testify to the vibrancy of Eastern worship and stand as living proof that the vision of St. John Chrysostom and St. Basil continues to illumine Eastern Christians.

Western Christians have much to gain from Schmemmann's eschatological understanding of the Eucharist as a participation in the heavenly liturgy. Keeping in mind his insistence on the symbol as key to understanding the sacrament, the Christian who communicates in the Eucharistic bread and wine is truly participating in the feast of the Kingdom. In Schmemmann's approach, the liturgical experience of the Church is the orientation to the Kingdom of God, "the *end* for the sake of which [the world] was created and saved."¹⁷⁸ As Schmemmann notes, all of this is accomplished in and through the Holy Spirit who ushers in the new life of the Kingdom of God to sanctify and

¹⁷⁶ Robert F. Taft, S.J., *Beyond East and West: Problems in Liturgical Understanding* (Rome: Pontifical Oriental Institute, 2001), 145.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 143.

¹⁷⁸ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 35.

transform the world. He notes, “Where the Holy Spirit is, there is the Kingdom of God.”¹⁷⁹ Schmemmann argues that the lack of liturgical consciousness among contemporary Christians is related to the lack of awareness of the eschatological character of liturgy, and indeed, of the Eucharist.¹⁸⁰ He posits that the symbolic nature of the Lord’s Day originated as the eschatological experience of the early Church. For the first Christians, it was the joyful experience of the Kingdom of God already in this world. Schmemmann believes that as eschatology became severed from the liturgical experience and explained in terms of creation’s final destiny, Christians lost the eschatological dimension of the liturgy so intrinsic to its nature.¹⁸¹

As Taft observes, the liturgy of the Christian East is “theophany, the privileged ground of our encounter with God.”¹⁸² It is the “heaven on earth” spoken of by St. Germanus of Constantinople,¹⁸³ and “the moment of truth”¹⁸⁴ described by Schmemmann, when Christ reveals the truth about God, the world, and human nature to Christian believers.¹⁸⁵ Schmemmann’s liturgical vision asserts the power and influence of worship in the formation of the authentic human person and the shaping of true Christian consciousness. It bids Christians of all traditions to approach liturgy with a renewed spirit of worship and a thirst to discover the holistic connection that it offers to life. Seen through the lens of Schmemmann’s vision, the liturgical text becomes a living creed and the means of participation in the mysteries of Christ. The hymns, gestures, incense, icons

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 42-43.

¹⁸² Taft, 159.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹⁸⁴ Schmemmann, “Theology and Eucharist,” *Liturgy and Tradition*, ed. Thomas Fisch (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1990), 87.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

and flowers serve to manifest the beauty of creation redeemed by Christ's presence and destined for glory in the heavenly Jerusalem. Herein lies the splendor of worship, the joy of the presence of the Kingdom given in the Holy Spirit. As Taft describes:

Worshiping in this atmosphere of profuse symbolism, through which the supernatural splendor of the inaccessible divine majesty and holiness is approached, Eastern Christians witness the exaltation and sanctification of creation, the majestic appearance of God who enters them, sanctifies them, divinizes them through the transfiguring light of his heavenly grace. It is not only a matter of 'receiving the sacraments,' but of living habitually within a liturgical ambiance that encompasses one in body and soul, transfiguring one's faith into a concrete vision of spiritual beauty and joy.¹⁸⁶

The liturgical experience of the Eastern Christian tradition holds fast to the spirit of the apostolic Church and the vision of the Fathers. While preserving the forms handed on by Basil and John Chrysostom, this great doxology has not become stagnate or locked in time, but continues to communicate and make present the mysteries of the Christian faith and the glory of the Kingdom of God in the apostolic and patristic spirit.¹⁸⁷

Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology has captured the apostolic and patristic spirit that serves to enhance the liturgical tradition of the East. However, it is a vision that reaches beyond the borders of the East like a beacon to enlighten the universal Church. In its rays, Christians come to realize that worship is the genuine expression of human nature and the true source of joy. In the Eucharist, divine love fills humankind and all creation with the glory of God.

Need for Further Research

The theological vision proposed by Alexander Schmemmann's Eucharistic theology is an invitation to the Christian theological community to attend to the signs of the "new

¹⁸⁶ Taft, 156-157.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

Christian springtime”¹⁸⁸ by committing to theologize “without boundaries.”¹⁸⁹ As Calian suggests, relating God’s Word to the world is a global task that must not be hindered by “parochial” or “fragmented”¹⁹⁰ theologizing. Rather, it must extend beyond the boundaries of Eastern and Western thought patterns to engage one another’s theological insights for the good of the Church ecumenical and universal. To remain closed within the walls of one’s own religious heritage and theological orientation poses the danger of obstructing the vision of wholeness that promises to carry the Church of the third millennium into the future. Schmemmann’s Eucharistic vision that holistically embraces the cosmos, the Church and the Kingdom, offers hope to the future of the Church and a promise of endless possibilities for theology. In light of the findings of this study, this writer invites more research to be done in Mariology, liturgy, and ecumenism as a means to usher in a new theological springtime for the Church.

Mariology

A striking paradox exists in the Orthodox East between the abundant Mariological references present in worship and the want of theological reflection.¹⁹¹ Schmemmann’s Mariological reflections give rise to the possibility of research to be done on Mary as the model of *theosis*. As Schmemmann posits, “all the goodness, spiritual

¹⁸⁸ John Paul II, “*Eastern Theology Has Enriched the Whole Church*,” (Vatican City: Church Documents, 1996) [database on-line]; available from Catholic Information Network.

¹⁸⁹ Taken from the title of the text, *Theology Without Boundaries: Encounters of Eastern Orthodoxy and Western Tradition*, Carnegie Samuel Calian, (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992).

¹⁹⁰ Calian, 92.

¹⁹¹ Alexander Schmemmann, *Celebration of Faith: The Virgin Mary*, vol. 3 (Crestwood: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2001), 85.

beauty, harmony and perfection that are the elements of genuine human nature”¹⁹² are found in Mary. She is the manifestation of the ultimate destiny of humanity in union with God. Mary, “the New Eve,”¹⁹³ is the model of obedience to God and loving acceptance of the human vocation to participate in divine life. By her obedience, Mary introduces the restoration of the order of creation lost by sin.¹⁹⁴ The *Theotokos* (Birthgiver of God)¹⁹⁵ models how the Eucharist is the “flesh and blood connection”¹⁹⁶ with humanity and the source of *theosis*. Mary’s motherhood reveals the anthropological dimension of Christology and informs the doctrine of the Incarnation, so critical in *theosis*. Mary’s relationship with the Holy Spirit models the deifying role of the Holy Spirit who unites the human person to Christ. It also testifies to the transforming and sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit Who fulfills human nature.¹⁹⁷ In her liturgical title, “the dawn of the mysterious day,”¹⁹⁸ Mary is the eschatological hope already realized. The mystery of her “blessed assumption”¹⁹⁹ invites research on the Eastern Christian position of original sin in Mary, the Western doctrine of the Immaculate Conception, and the Dormition. It also stimulates discussion on the doctrine of the resurrection of the body, incorruptibility and immortality.²⁰⁰ Clearly, many of the seeds for this type of research have been planted in Schmemmann’s Mariology.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 75-76.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 92.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

Liturgy

In the original proposal for this study, the writer projected the need for further investigation to be done in the area of the Divine Liturgies of the East, particularly the Divine Liturgy of St. Basil and St. John Chrysostom. One possible direction was to analyze these liturgies in search of deification themes. Another suggested study was to conduct a comparative analysis of the liturgical forms of the Eastern and Western rites in search of deification themes. The third projected study, which posed the question of the influence of the Divine Liturgy on the writings of Alexander Schmemmann, has already been proven in this study. However, the theological propositions of Jean Daniélou's text, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, offers insight into an engagement with the Divine Liturgies of the East. As noted, Daniélou urged a recovery of the biblical theology of the early Fathers of the Church in order to reacquaint Christian worshippers with the meaning of the sacramental rites of the Church. Tracing the eschatological, Christological, and sacramental typology of biblical theology inherent in the liturgical rites, enriches sacramental understanding by exposing the power of biblical symbolism inherent in sacramental signs and symbols. Daniélou argues that biblical typology opens windows of understanding to the meaning of Christ's deeds that were steeped in the Old Testament.²⁰¹ A suggested approach includes an investigation into the mystagogical catecheses of St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Ambrose placed in dialogue with Schmemmann's baptismal ecclesiology as articulated in the text, *Of Water and the Spirit*. Equally helpful to the conversation is the eighth century document of St. Germanus of Constantinople, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, translated by Paul Meyendorff; Robert Taft's, *The Liturgy of the Great*

²⁰¹ Daniélou, *The Bible and the Liturgy*, 6-7.

Church: An Initial Synthesis of Structure and Interpretation on the Eve of Iconoclasm; and R. Bornet's treatise, *Les commentaries byzantines de la divine liturgie du VIIe au XVe siècle*. Such a study would seek to retrieve the richness of the liturgical experience of the apostolic and patristic Church.

Ecumenism

The third and final proposed study reaches into the heart of the “estrangement”²⁰² between the Christian Churches of the East and West for the sake of promoting “forgiveness, reconciliation and restorative justice”²⁰³ to a Church that has veered from the path of unity. Its purpose is to work toward bridging the distance between the Eastern and Western Christian Churches through a renewed ecclesiological dialogue that seeks to explore and implement the transforming and unifying power of the Eucharist. Based on the Parisian model of the theological dialogue of the Franco-Russian circle of the 1930's and 1940's, this study would seek to design a model of priestly formation that will serve seminarians of Eastern and Western rites, dedicated to rebuilding and reuniting the Church of the future. The Parisian theological circle of the twentieth century models the limitless possibilities in ecclesial, liturgical, and theological renewal that exist when persons of faith are no longer afraid to step over the theological lines of demarcation and enter one another's spiritual worlds. Congar, Bouyer, Daniélou, and Schmemmann are witnesses to the Church of the fruits of the Spirit that ripen in an atmosphere of shared

²⁰² Yves Congar, O.P., *After Nine Hundred Years: The Background of the Schism Between the Eastern and Western Churches* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1959), 5.

²⁰³ Rodney L. Petersen, “Forgiveness and Reconciliation in Christian Theology: A Public Role for the Church in Civil Society,” *The Orthodox Churches in a Pluralistic World: An Ecumenical Conversation*, ed. Emmanuel Clapsis (Brookline: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004), 111.

worship and dialogue. Congar's extensive work in ecumenism, particularly *Divided Christendom, After Nine Hundred Years, Unity in Diversity, and I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, provides the foundation for this study. Bouyer's Eucharistic theology placed in dialogue with Schmemmann offers a sacramental vision that incorporates both theological worlds. Daniélou joins the theological conversation with the application of biblical theology to sacramental and liturgical understanding. The seminary curriculum would include the following courses: History of the Church (as recounted in both traditions); Patristic Theology of East and West; Historical Development of the Liturgical Traditions of East and West; Documents of the World Council of Churches; The Councils of the Church; The Holy Spirit in the Church; Towards a Theology of Reconciliation; and Ecumenism and Mission. The faculty would consist of scholars from both traditions and would not be limited to a male population. A seminary designed to overturn the destructive forces that have locked the Church in the past would provide an ecumenical milieu that would foster dialogue in an atmosphere of prayer and worship. It would seek to eradicate the differences that have emerged from political, cultural and theological histories in order to rediscover the common faith confessed in Baptism and the unifying principle of the Eucharist. Aspiring priests of both traditions, in an effort to purge the Church of the sins of the past, would lead the Church on her journey to the Kingdom in full communion,

So that from east to west
a perfect offering may be made
to the glory of [God's] name.²⁰⁴

²⁰⁴ Eucharistic Prayer III, *The Vatican II Sunday Missal*, 612.

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